

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA
LIBRARY



THE WILMER COLLECTION
OF CIVIL WAR NOVELS
PRESENTED BY
RICHARD H. WILMER, JR.

WILMER COLLECTION

CAMERON HALL:

A STORY OF THE CIVIL WAR.

BY

M. A. C.

AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE EPISCOPALIAN," "BESSIE MELVILLE," ETC.

War,
Grim-visag'd, fierce, relentless War
Hath ravag'd all our land! Fields, which once
Smiled in the beauty of the early spring,
Or waved with golden grain in harvest-time,
Are desolate and waste. Homes, which once
Resounded with the mirth of joy and song,
Are voiceless now, and still. Hearts, which once
Were glad and bright as our own sunny skies,
Are cold, and dark, and dead! Land, homes, and hearts
Alike are desolate!

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1867.

Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by

MARY A. CRUSE,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Northern District of Alabama.

CAMERON HALL:

TO

MRS. L. N. WALTHALL,

OF MARION, ALABAMA,

FATHER'S FRIEND,

I Dedicate this Volume,

AS A GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF KINDNESS WHICH CAN BE

NEITHER REPAID NOR FORGOTTEN.

(iii)

TO THE READER

The following story was completed several months before the termination of the war, the result of which, so different from our anticipations, seemed at first to necessitate a change, or at least a modification of many of the opinions and hopes originally expressed by some of the characters. Upon reflection, however, it was decided to leave it as it is, a truthful picture as it is believed to be, not only of scenes and events which occurred immediately around the author's home, but also of the inner thoughts and feelings, the hopes and expectations, in a word, the nature of the Southern heart. In the narration of scenes, all exaggeration has been avoided, and a middle ground has been taken. One section of the country will most probably pronounce them overdrawn; the other class! will know and feel that "the half has not been told."

I send my bookman in these days of war and literary criticism, it pretends to have no great literary merit; but it does claim to belong rather to truth than to fiction, and this claim will be acknowledged by thousands of hearts in this our land.

M. A. C.
(3)

Lexington, Ala.,
March, 1866.

(*)

TO THE READER.

THE following story was completed several months before the termination of the war, the result of which, so different from our anticipations, seemed at first to necessitate a change, or at least a modification of many of the opinions and hopes confidently expressed by some of the characters. Upon reflection, however, it was decided to leave it as it is; a truthful picture as it is believed to be, not only of scenes and events which occurred immediately around the author's home, but also of the inner thoughts and feelings, the hopes and expectations, in a word, the *animus* of the Southern heart. In the delineation of scenes, all exaggeration has been avoided, and a middle ground has been taken. One section of the country will most probably pronounce them *overdrawn*; the other, alas! will *know* and *feel* that "the half has not been told."

I send my book out, neither challenging nor fearing criticism. It pretends to have no great literary merit; but it *does* claim to belong rather to truth than to fiction, and this claim will be acknowledged by thousands of hearts in this, our land.

M. A. C.

HUNTSVILLE, ALA.,

March, 1866.

THE HISTORY OF THE

First part of the history of the world, from the beginning of time to the present day. The second part of the history of the world, from the present day to the end of time.

The third part of the history of the world, from the end of time to the beginning of the next world. The fourth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the next world to the end of the next world.

The fifth part of the history of the world, from the end of the next world to the beginning of the next world. The sixth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the next world to the end of the next world.

The seventh part of the history of the world, from the end of the next world to the beginning of the next world. The eighth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the next world to the end of the next world.

The ninth part of the history of the world, from the end of the next world to the beginning of the next world. The tenth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the next world to the end of the next world.

CAMERON HALL.

CHAPTER I.

A PLEASANT, old-fashioned Virginia country house was Cameron Hall; not old fashioned in the English sense of the word, with the clustering ivy, the growth of centuries, clinging to its moss-grown walls, but old fashioned in the meaning of that word in this country of rapid progress and development. The Hall had been built by Mr. Cameron's grandfather, and was therefore regarded in this new world of ours as a very old mansion. The present proprietor had no sympathy with that restless propensity to modernize, that is so common in this age and land. He was content with the old homestead as it was, and the associations, which extended far back to his early childhood and infancy, were more valuable to him than those so-called modern improvements by which the old house, as if ashamed of what in reality made it venerable, should, like the frail old devotee of fashion, seek to hide its age beneath a fictitious show of youth. The old-fashioned appearance of the Hall was not unlike its old-fashioned hospitality; and in winter none remembered that the spacious fireplace was old fashioned when its blazing fire of hickory logs diffused warmth and cheerfulness through its spacious rooms, nor in summer, when its windows, opening down to the floor upon a pleasant veranda, gave free admission to the cool country breeze, did any recollect that those windows were too narrow and the panes of glass too small to meet the requirements of modern architecture. At all times and seasons its wide-spread doors were open to receive the many guests who were not unwilling to accept its invitations; and the Christmas festivities and the summer parties at Cameron Hall afforded both present enjoyment and pleasing memories to all who participated in them.

Mr. Cameron's was one of those calm, unruffled spirits whose equanimity is not easily disturbed. His was a quiet rather than an enthusiastic temperament, and he found in his own home, and in his domestic circle, all the earthly happiness that he desired.

The stream of his life had always flowed with a gentle current, for although he had his trials like other men, still he bore with patient fortitude what would have chafed and fretted a more restless disposition; and those who looked upon his placid face often attributed to prosperous circumstances a serenity which was in truth mainly due to his own even temper.

His wife was, by nature, a gentle, dependent woman, and made still more so by disease and weakness; but she leaned with unswerving trust upon the strong arm and the strong love that had supported her for so many years, and the life that might otherwise have been wearisome if not intolerable, was rendered as calm and peaceful as unwearied attention and gentle offices could make it. As husband and wife, there was nothing to disturb the serenity of their happiness; but as father and mother, they had much to cause anxiety and to cloud their hearts.

Their family consisted of two sons and two daughters.

George, the eldest, was a wayward, moody, self-willed boy, one of those incomprehensible freaks of nature, which makes one member of the family circle utterly unlike all the rest, inheriting the disposition of neither father nor mother, and developing from the same training with the others, entirely different results. His mother had tried every kind of discipline with him, until, worn out in the unequal conflict, rendered still more unequal by her weakness and shattered nerves, she had at last given up everything except praying for him and loving him. He was now a tall, stalwart youth, robust and well made, and but for the dark frown that generally clouded his brow, he would have been extremely handsome. In his intercourse with his younger brother and sisters, there was nothing kind or endearing. On the contrary, he had ruled them all with a rod of iron, until they had learned to regard him with mingled fear and dislike.

The little Julia was a gentle, thoughtful child, several years younger than George. She had been, all her life, the companion of her invalid mother, and had learned in her sick-room to be quiet beyond her years. The circumstances of her childhood had conspired to render her mature and womanly. Whenever her mother was confined to her bed, she was the housekeeper; and the pleasure and pride that she felt when her father called her "his little woman," urged her, even in early childhood, to emulate those virtues and perform those duties which belonged to her mother.

Walter, the third child, was five years old; a thorough boy, full of fun and frolic and noise, shouting and hallooing all day long in the exuberance of life and animal spirits, and bounding and rushing through the house, with his dog Carlo at his heels,



until his mother's nerves could bear no more, and she would offer him a reward (which he was never known to win) if he would sit still one half hour. Unlike his brother, he was social in his disposition, and as he found in George a tyrannical ruler rather than an elder brother, and as he could not be interested in Julia's quiet amusements, he was thrown upon his baby-sister, Eva, for society, and these two, the youngest of the family, were inseparable.

Eva was just three years old, and tottered about all day long at Walter's side. When she grew tired, he used to put her into her little carriage and pull her about, under the supervision of Mammy Nancy, the old nurse; but one day when she was out of sight, Master Walter slipped his little sister hastily into the carriage, and, promising her "a splendid ride," went tearing along furiously down the graveled carriage-way that led from the house to the gate of the lawn. Of course the carriage was upset, and Eva's screams brought Mammy Nancy to the spot, where she found the little culprit trembling with terror, and wiping away the blood from his sister's face. Since that time he had been forbidden ever to "play horse" again to Eva's carriage; and afraid now ever to trust the two children together out of her sight, the limbs of the old nurse often ached in her vain effort to follow them in their ceaseless round. And so it came to pass that the little maiden Julia frequently offered to relieve Mammy, by taking charge of Eva; and as she could be implicitly trusted, she very soon established her claim to be as good a nurse for the baby as she was for her mother.

Her quiet and gentle firmness soon gave her a sort of motherly authority and influence, not only over her baby-sister, but also over Walter, who, though only three years younger than herself, always acknowledged her supremacy, and obeyed her when he only laughed at his old nurse.

Eva, the joyous little Eva, was the sunbeam of the household. Sunny-faced, sunny-haired, sunny-hearted, she seemed the very embodiment of sunshine. The merry laugh, however loud and ringing, never disturbed her mother, or jarred her nerves, and the little face, always smiling, and set in a frame-work of fair clustering curls, was ever welcome. Nobody ever passed her without a caress: sometimes a kiss, sometimes a gentle tap upon the plump, white neck, or a pull at her curls, and sometimes only a word; but in return she always gave a bright, arch look from her brown eyes, or a happy smile. Her brother George was the only one who ever passed her without notice, and from him she always seemed to shrink. He did not often make any overtures to her, and when he did, it always galled and fretted him to see that she resisted all his efforts to make friends with her. She

was afraid of him, and whenever she saw him coming, she would hide her head in Mammy Nancy's lap, or under Julia's apron.

As to Walter, he did not love his brother, but, true boy that he was, he was not afraid of him. While the difference in their ages would, under any circumstances, have prevented them from being companions, yet there were many ways in which George, as the elder brother, might have won the little Walter's heart and made him love him. But the reverse was the case; and sometimes, either to assert the authority to which he thought his superior age entitled him, or else from an innate love of seeing others unhappy, George invaded Walter's domain and interfered with his amusements. In these contests, Walter was of course always worsted; but, undaunted and defiant still, he asserted his rights just as boldly the next time, to find himself again overcome by superior strength. Sometimes, stung by a sense of injustice and wrong, and unable to defend himself, the little Walter appealed to his mother; but Julia, seeing how sick and exhausted she invariably was after one of those scenes with George, tried herself to be first Walter's champion, and afterward a peace-maker, and was generally unsuccessful in both capacities.

All through the years of his childhood, Mr. Cameron had watched this son with anxiety, but as in all the circumstances of life he was accustomed to be serene and hopeful, so he was now. Like his wife, he too had tried every kind of discipline; he had tried first to make him love him, and then to fear him, had appealed to all that might be noble and generous in his nature, and afterward had tried the effect of severity. He did not know what else to do now except to wait patiently for results which he could not but acknowledge were long in coming. George was now old enough to be somewhat of a companion for his father, who thought that to place him on an equality with himself, to discuss his plans with him, and to interest him in his business affairs might, by making him realize that he was one day to be a man like his father, and even to take his father's place, fire his ambition to emulate the virtues of manhood; but it was all of no avail. He sought George's society, offered to participate in his amusements, and treated him not only as a son but as an equal too; but the boy could not be won. Generally sullen and moody, he seemed to want no society, and yet this habitual temper was sometimes lighted up by a vivacity and sprightliness which showed how much there was both of mind and of the capacity to please, if he only chose to exercise it. Even at this early age, called by common consent "the awkward age," George Cameron showed, when he pleased, much of his father's courtesy and ease of man-

ner; and if his humor prompted, could make himself as agreeable to the guests of his father and mother as to those of his own age. But these occasional and fitful gleams were like the fringe of sunlight upon the thunder-cloud, showing how dark and impenetrable must be the veil which can hide so much light.

The only use that George seemed to have for his kind, was to tyrannize. He loved to be supreme, to control; not only himself to know his power, but to make others feel it too. It was an unnatural and enormous development of that feeling which belongs to man, which was implanted in his nature for wise purposes, and, if properly restrained, will produce wise and beneficial results. Man's consciousness and love of power is, when properly exercised, one of the noblest elements of his manhood. It gives stability, firmness, self-reliance to him who needs them all, not only for himself, but also for that weaker sex whom God has intrusted to his keeping: but unrestrained or abused, it allies him who was "made in God's own image," to those fallen spirits whose love of power was their ruin.

George tyrannized over all who came within his reach, and the contests between Walter and himself became more instead of less frequent, as they grew older. In one, the love of power was strengthened by daily indulgence; and in the other, a determined resistance grew stronger in proportion as he learned better his own rights and the injustice of his brother's usurpation.

Mr. Cameron saw it all with pain. He was too just a man, too true a father, to allow the stronger child to oppress the weaker, and whenever he knew it he interfered; but his efforts with George had all been so fruitless, and his conflicts with him were so painful, that, disheartened and discouraged, he tried not to see these childish difficulties, and to allow the children to settle them themselves.

This son, the first born, was the only domestic sorrow that Mr. Cameron had ever known. The bond between himself and his wife was a marriage in the true sense of the word. They were one in heart and soul, in interests and sympathies, and the fervor of youthful passion, unlike the foam-crest upon the wave which leaves no trace behind, had been rather like a little rill, which, as years passed on, had deepened and widened into a quiet and subdued, but a strong, full current of affection. She had now been so long an invalid that the anxieties which he felt at first were all gone. She had been spared so long, and from year to year was so little changed in appearance, that her husband, clinging to her with the hope that always sustained him, seemed to forget that disease, unchecked, must at last sap the foundations of life. She was not always confined to her bed, or even to her room, and

if her wasted form and pallid cheek sometimes excited his fears, they were soon allayed by her uncomplaining patience and uniform cheerfulness.

And so it had gone on for years. She still loved to see her friends, and to have them in her house, although her days of health and strength were gone; and no child enjoyed the Christmas-tree, and the Christmas dance after it, more than the invalid mother, who, wrapped in shawls and seated close by the fire, watched the bright eyes and the happy faces of childhood, and whose kindly heart kindled with the pleasure that was reflected from theirs.

One day, in the early summer, Julia, Walter, and Eva were sitting on the lawn upon the grass under an oak-tree. Walter was making curls of dandelion stalks, which his sister fastened in among Eva's curls, while Julia herself was twining a wreath with which to surmount the whole, and thus arrayed, the child was to be taken in to see mamma and Mammy Nancy. Julia and Walter were very busy, when the former felt Eva creep up close to her side, and the little head was nestled against her shoulder. Julia looked round and saw George coming toward them.

"Don't be afraid, baby," she whispered; "he won't hurt you."

Walter now looked up from his work and squared himself for the approaching contest, for experience had taught him that whenever he and George were together, such a result was inevitable.

Julia patted him on the head, and said:

"Be a quiet, good boy now, Walter. Go on making your curls, and don't notice George. Perhaps he won't say anything to you."

The child did not reply, but he gave a little defiant toss of his head, which said plainly that he intended to maintain his rights if it should become necessary.

George came along, apparently not intending to stop; but when he saw Walter's work, he paused, and said disdainfully:

"Turning girl, Walter, are you? I always thought that it was a pity you had not been born a girl, you love to stay with them so much, and try so hard to be like them."

He well knew how this taunt would exasperate the child, who, with true boyish nature, would rather be called anything in the world than a girl. His face grew red and his eyes filled, but he choked back the tears which he knew would only bring a repetition of the hateful epithet. He sprang from his seat, dashed his dandelion curls upon the ground, and, planting himself firmly and squarely before his antagonist, he said, half crying:

"I would rather be a girl—yes, I would rather be *two* girls—than to be such a cross boy as you are. If ever I grow up to be like you, I'd be sorry sure enough that God didn't make me a girl!"

George held in his hand a willow twig, and his only reply to the child was a contemptuous flourish of it, which, either accidentally or otherwise, stung Walter's hand severely. He cried out with the pain, and Julia, jumping up and placing herself before Walter, exclaimed indignantly:

"For shame! for shame! you are a coward to treat a little boy so, and you shan't do it if I can help it! If you want to strike, strike, but Walter shall not feel it."

So saying, she planted herself so as to shield him; but there was no need now. George forgot Walter altogether in his rage at being called a coward by such a child as Julia, and this time, intentionally, the switch cut her severely across the face, leaving a bright red mark.

She screamed with the pain, and then hot, passionate tears rushed down her cheeks. Seizing Eva, she partly carried and partly dragged her to the house to lay the case before mamma, and had almost reached her mother's door before she remembered that her father had told her never to disturb her mother with any childish quarrels, and so she changed her mind and went to him in the library.

Mr. Cameron was lying asleep on the sofa, from which he started up in haste at the unusual sound of that sobbing voice. She did not often cry, and never before had her father seen anything like this storm of passion. Her accustomed gentleness and quietness only made her present excitement the more remarkable, and he tried in vain for some minutes to find out, between the choking sobs, what was the matter. At last she wiped her eyes, and, looking up in his face, pointed to the bright mark just underneath her eye, and sobbed out:

"Brother George did it!"

The father was outraged. If there was a spot deep down in his heart more tender than the rest, this little daughter had found it and nestled there. This "little woman" was often his only companion, for while his eldest son avoided him, and the two youngest children were too restless to be contented with him long at a time, the quiet Julia was never happier than when with her father, nor was he ever lonely if she was near.

The sight of that mark upon her face stirred up all his indignation, and, rushing out on the veranda, he called loudly for George. There was no response; and, returning to the library, Mr. Cameron muttered:

"Perhaps it is well: I am too angry to talk to him now."

He took Julia in his lap, and wiped away her tears; and when her excitement was sufficiently abated, he made her tell him all the particulars of the occurrence. She related it all just as it happened, and finished by saying, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes:

"We were not troubling him, papa. We were attending to our own business, and if he had gone along and attended to his, all this would never have happened."

Mr. Cameron, while trying to calm his little daughter, was himself greatly excited, and the more he thought of it, the more indignant he became, and the more his justice revolted from the idea of permitting one child thus to tyrannize over the others. He was so annoyed and perplexed that he felt incapable of exercising his usually good judgment, and although he endeavored to keep all such troubles from his wife's knowledge, yet he felt constrained to lay this one before her and ask her advice. When Julia was sufficiently calmed, he left her to entertain herself and Eva in the library, and he went to seek his wife.

She listened in silent sorrow; and when the story was ended, her husband said:

"Such conduct cannot be permitted. It is not only unjust to the other children, but to ourselves as well. It will not be long before the boy will be so tyrannical and overbearing, that even father and mother will be set aside or perhaps trampled upon. I will put a stop to it at once, and give him a plain talk to-night, which will show him that there are limits even to my forbearance; and God knows that if ever a father tried forbearance with a wayward son, I have with him."

"Henry," said his wife, laying her hand gently upon his arm, "let me manage this business. You are excited now, and so is George, and if you come in conflict you will both probably say something that were better left unsaid. I am calm; and I am his mother; let me do it, will you?"

"Yes, wife, if you say so; but you are too feeble to be worried and excited by these things; and besides, you are too gentle with him. The boy needs a strong curb."

"I will be firm and plain, husband," she answered; "and gentleness combined with these will surely not be wrong. I shall not conceal from George what I think of his conduct generally, and of this case particularly. While I remember that I am his mother, I shall certainly not forget that I am also the mother of my other children."

"You will do right, wife, I know," he replied. "I only wish that I had self-control enough to do it as well, and save you the pain and sorrow."

When Mr. Cameron returned to the library, Julia and Eva were sitting upon the floor with a large book open before them, looking at the pictures; at least Eva was, but Julia was in a deep study. She did not look up or notice her father until he was close to her, and said :

“What are you thinking about, little daughter?”

“About myself and brother George, papa, that we are both naughty children: he, for striking me, and I, for getting into such a passion and running to tell you. Please, papa, don’t tell him that I told you, and don’t scold him for it. I am sorry that I was angry with him, and may be he is just as sorry that he struck me. So let it go, will you, papa?”

“But, Julia, if I let it go, he may strike you again, and I must not permit that.”

“No, sir,” she answered confidently, “he will never strike me again if he thinks that I wouldn’t tell upon him.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Because, papa, it would be mean, *too* mean for him to strike me when he knows that I won’t tell upon him—no, he would never do that.”

Her father smiled at the childish magnanimity, and promised that he would not say a word to George upon the subject.

After tea, George was summoned to his mother’s room. What passed at the interview never transpired; but that night she had a violent hemorrhage which threatened instant death, and was, with great difficulty, checked. The next morning George was gone. No message or word of explanation was left, no farewell for father or mother, no confession of wrong, or petition for pardon.

Mr. Cameron did not tell his wife. Prostrate in body and broken hearted, she asked no questions and made no allusion to him. The physician had forbidden her to speak; but once or twice, as her husband bent over her pillow, he caught the low murmur :

“Oh, the pang of a thankless child ! a thankless child !”

Three days afterward she died.

CHAPTER II.

SEVERAL years had now passed away. From George himself Mr. Cameron had never received a line; but once or twice he had heard of him, tidings not very welcome to a father's ear. Children soon forget; and the name of George, once as familiar in the household as that of Julia or Walter, became a strange, unaccustomed sound. Eva had no recollection whatever of the brother who had been the terror of her infancy, and with Walter his memory was more like a painful dream than a reality. Julia, of course, remembered him well, and that last painful scene; but her father had taken care that she should never know that it had aught to do with his departure from home, or with her mother's death. She was an undemonstrative child; but she had a warm, affectionate heart, and he well knew how it would grieve her in after-life to know that a childish quarrel with her had been the cause of a brother's voluntary exile, or, what was still worse, that it had remotely caused the death of the mother whom she so dearly loved.

Only the father still remembered George with a painful, bitter memory—not only as his wayward, undutiful son, but as the immediate cause of a calamity which would darken all the rest of his life; but the name of George never passed his lips, and, as years rolled by and he was immersed in the cares and duties of life, it might have seemed that the father, as well as the children, had forgotten the rebellious son.

The education of his children now engrossed much of Mr. Cameron's thought. They were quite old enough to go to school, and there were no good schools in Hopedale. They were too young to send from home, even if he had been willing to do so; but he never for a moment entertained such a thought. He did not think that any education could compensate for the loss of home influence; and, besides this, he could not consent to subject himself to a life of loneliness without his children. He had been trying for some time to secure the services of a governess; but upon this point, too, he had peculiar notions, which it was difficult to satisfy, and so he had himself taught his children at home.

One day about this time the little Julia came running in to tell her father that Mr. Derby was coming; and Mr. Cameron went out to meet the minister.

When they were seated in the library, Mr. Derby said:

"Well, sir, you could at last have your long-wished for governess but for one thing, which I am afraid will prove a grave deficiency. The lady is a Southerner, and feels herself quite capable of teaching; but unfortunately she comes without reference or recommendation."

"Unfortunately truly, I should think, for her hopes of success. This, of course, sir, decides me at once. I cannot consent to receive into my family and commit my motherless children to the care and training of a stranger who comes without reference or recommendation. You know, Mr. Derby, that my circumstances require me to be doubly careful. I have to be both father and mother to my children. Is she a young woman?"

"Scarcely more than twenty, I judge. I always feel a profound pity when I see a woman scarcely more than a girl, just when she seems most to need the protecting shelter of home, thrown out upon this hard world to struggle for herself. My sympathies are greatly enlisted for this young stranger. Young and friendless, ignorant of the ways of the world, and without experience, life promises to be a rough and thorny road for her."

"If she is so young and inexperienced, Mr. Derby, perhaps she does not know the value of references;—but, pshaw! that cannot be either, for, if she were so ignorant herself, she surely would have some friends to tell her better. Give me her address, Mr. Derby; I will write to her myself. If she is a proper person, I would like extremely to have her, for my children (Julia especially) are old enough to require more regular teaching than I give them; and yet I cannot make up my mind to send them away from home to school."

"You can see Mrs. Merton, Mr. Cameron, by riding into town."

"Already here!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron. "Does she expect to drop down into a community, a perfect stranger and without recommendation, and get employment at once? She must be inexperienced, indeed."

"Really, Mr. Cameron, I scarcely know what she expects or what she intends to do. I received a note from her yesterday requesting me to call and see her immediately, which I did. She looked so young and so helpless, she seemed to have so little knowledge of the world, and yet withal such a strong, brave purpose to aid herself by any honest means, that I could not help getting interested in her; nor could you, I am sure, sir, if you were to see her. And then, too, she has a blind child about a year old."

"A child!—ha!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, as his brow darkened; and, after a short pause, he added decidedly:

"A stranger without reference. No, sir, I could not have her as governess for my daughters."

"I am not surprised, Mr. Cameron, that you should feel so; for it is not only natural, but it is right that you should know to whom you commit the training of your children. I myself feel persuaded that you would run no risk in opening your doors to this stranger; but I cannot prove it to you. I judge only from appearances, which are not always to be relied on, and it is possible that in this instance I may be mistaken. I have promised to do what I can for her; but I must acknowledge to others, as I have to you, that she is a stranger, and comes I know not whence, and without recommendation. All these things must, of course, be obstacles in the way of her success, and so I told her frankly."

"And what did she say to that?"

"She only answered that she had no reference, nor was it possible for her to give any; that all she wanted was a fair trial, and if she did not faithfully perform what she undertook to do, that she neither expected nor desired to be encouraged. I told her, as delicately as I could, that more than this was generally required, and that parents liked to know something of the character and acquirements of those to whom they intrusted their children. She seemed neither surprised nor resentful; but a slight flush was upon her pale cheek as she answered, with an indescribable sadness: 'I can tell them nothing about myself; my past life is now dead and buried; it is only with the present that they or I have anything to do.' Her words made me feel uncomfortable, and I could not repress a slight feeling of annoyance at the quiet but decided way in which she silenced all allusions to her past life; and yet there was something in her manner and deportment which effectually put down any unpleasant suspicions that her words might have awakened. She seemed as free from vanity and self-sufficiency as any person that I ever saw; and yet there was a quiet confidence in her own capacity, a firm self-reliance which, while it was not inconsistent with humility, relieved her at once from the attitude of a suppliant, and excited an involuntary admiration. She asked for nothing except an opportunity to help herself; and, although she did not say so by word or look, yet I suspect that if I do not help her to find the opportunity, she will find it without me. The only thing that she seems fully determined upon is to live in Hopedale. What she is to do here, how she is to support herself,—these are still open questions; but to stay here is her fixed, unalterable resolution."

"Did she give you any reasons for this?"

"Two or three, which I interpreted rather as a delicate way of

declining the question than an answer to it. When I reminded her that Hopedale was a very small town, and perhaps she might do better in a larger sphere of action, she replied very quietly, but with an indescribable positiveness that permitted no further discussion: 'No, sir, I prefer to live in Hopedale.'"

"What do you propose to do for her, Mr. Derby?"

"I will do the best that I can," replied the minister; "but that will be little enough. I would willingly do more, for I am persuaded that my interest and sympathy are not misplaced; but, unfortunately for us both, she withholds from me the knowledge without which it would be wrong to recommend her. All that I am justified in doing is to tell others what I have told you, and, as your own case proves, this is rather to excite prejudice than to recommend. Perhaps, after all, it would be better to let her make her own way. If all that I know of her operates against her rather than otherwise, it were better left unsaid; if I cannot help the friendless young stranger, I would not certainly do anything to injure her success."

"If she brought no letters, how did she happen to send for you?"

"Simply because I am a minister. She apologized for doing so, and said, in a simple, touching way, that she took it for granted that I had somewhat of my Master's compassion for the desolate and friendless, and that, as she asked and needed nothing but kind words, she could not deem it presumption to ask them from a minister of the church."

"That touched you, Mr. Derby, I know; and what did you answer?"

"I could not and I ought not, Mr. Cameron," he replied earnestly, "to have been satisfied with offering kind words only, those words which, St. James tells us, are but empty wind unless accompanied with the corresponding action. Desolate and friendless she was, indeed; she needed not to tell me, for I read it in her face; frail and delicate, and with a blind baby, too! No, sir; words only would not have done for such a case as that."

"And what did you do?"

"I asked her to go home with me until she had decided upon some definite plan of action."

"Were you doing justice then, Mr. Derby, to yourself, your wife and children? Your salary is small, and not proportionate to the wants of your own family; was it right to add two more to your household? Excuse the liberty that I take, and put it all down to the account of my personal friendship for you. You ministers are too apt," he added, smiling, "to take a one-sided view of duty, and sometimes, as in the present case, you need a

little of the caution of the man of the world to adjust the balance."

"No apology is necessary, Mr. Cameron," he replied; "our friendship is too old now for misunderstanding or misconception. I will answer your questions as frankly as you have asked them. My salary is small, as you say, scarcely sufficient, with the strictest economy, to meet the wants of my household, and the addition of two more to the family would not have been inconsiderable. All these things I took into the account, and even then my duty was plain."

"And what did your wife say to your bringing to your house, and making one of your family, a stranger, who herself throws, to say the least of it, a painful doubt upon her past history?"

"My wife, sir, learns her duty from the same book that I do; and there we have both been taught to 'entertain the stranger.'"

Mr. Cameron shook his head and answered:

"It is a great risk, sir, a very great risk. I am glad that your little daughters are too young to be injured by wrong influence. I know that not for all this world would I trust my little woman with her."

"I would not fear anything," said the minister, "from that frank, open face; but even if I did, my duty has in this instance involved no sacrifice. Mrs. Merton would not accept my offer."

"She would not!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, in surprise.

"No, sir; she thanked me gratefully, but repeated that she intended to help herself."

"That is the right spirit, certainly," replied Mr. Cameron, "and speaks well for her so far at least."

"Of her ability to do that, sir, she seems never to have entertained a doubt; and it is the more remarkable because she is so frail looking. She does not look strong enough to bear much fatigue, either bodily or mental, and yet she speaks with confidence of supporting herself and child by her own unassisted exertions."

At the mention of the child, Mr. Cameron's brow was again clouded, and he said, almost sharply:

"She cannot be governess for my children, Mr. Derby; nor if she gets a school shall I send them to her."

And so the matter ended. The young stranger succeeded in getting not more than half a dozen pupils at first; but to these she devoted herself with energy and faithfulness, and it was not many months before she proved to Mr. Derby that she had spoken truly when she said that she only wanted an opportunity to help herself. At first she was, of course, the subject of much painful comment in the village. She knew and felt it, and her pale, young

face would flush and her heart throb as she encountered the curious, doubtful gaze, or heard the slighting remark. But she lived in quiet, unobtrusive retirement, and busied herself, when out of school, with her blind baby, which was at once her anxiety and her comfort, her sorrow and her only pleasure. As time passed on, the unknown stranger and the mysterious circumstances of her advent into Hopedale were forgotten in other more important personal events, and Mrs. Merton, the school-teacher, if thought of at all, was only remembered with reference to her vocation, and none seemed to think or care that she had not always belonged to the town. The minister and his family were almost her only visitors. Mr. Derby's interest in her, so far from diminishing, had increased with his more thorough knowledge of her character. From his first acquaintance with her, he had watched her narrowly and visited her frequently, and in all his intercourse with her he had never seen anything in her character or demeanor to make him recall the involuntary admiration that he had expressed to Mr. Cameron. On the contrary, he was more and more convinced that whatever unexplained mystery enveloped her early life, and whatever sadness and suffering she had endured, it was no fault of hers. The respect that he had felt for the young stranger had gradually deepened into a warm affection for his parishioner, whose friendlessness only served to render stronger the bond that bound her to him, her only friend. The kindness which was never withdrawn because she did not give him her confidence, the delicacy which carefully avoided allusion to what she chose to envelop in mystery, the word of pastoral sympathy and counsel which he never failed to leave behind; above all, his interest in the child whose infirmity rendered poverty and friendlessness double evils,—all these touched her heart and awakened its deepest gratitude. She soon learned to talk to Mr. Derby without reserve. She went to him for advice as if he had known her all his life; but of that life she still said not a word. It seemed, indeed, as if it were, to use her own words, dead and buried, and as if she not only intended to bury itself but its memory, too, in the grave of the past. Often had the minister wondered that upon this point she was always guarded; she never forgot herself, and never had he in one single instance heard her allude to herself or her life before she came to Hopedale.

That she still had, and would always have, a heavy burden upon her heart, he could not doubt, for it was written upon her face; but she had a quiet, patient way of bearing it, never trying to conceal it under a false mirth, and yet never obtruding it upon the notice of others; and her brave, undaunted spirit, her energy,

so disproportionate to her physical strength, and her determination to take care of herself and her child,—all these seemed to Mr. Derby very remarkable in one so young; one, too, who, it was easy to see, had all her life been herself taken care of, and who was now making her first experiment in helping herself. Such, however, the minister alone knew her to be; to the rest of the world she was only Mrs. Merton, the poor, young school-teacher, a quiet, inoffensive woman, remarkable for nothing and intruding upon nobody.

Ah, how little does the world know of our inner life! How many a heart, whose struggles the angels watch with sympathy and pity, is seamed and wrinkled and scarred by conflicts of which the world never dreams! how many a young life totters and falters, and, alas! sometimes falls, under a burden of sorrow far heavier than the weight of years, while the gay and jesting world, like the priest and the Levite, passes by on the other side unconscious or regardless of its suffering!

Grace Merton had been in Hopedale two years. Her school was now quite flourishing, and she had rented a cottage, very small and very humble, but sufficient for the requirements of herself and her little Agnes, now three years old. Sometimes, as she sat in the summer evening in her little porch, over which the sweet-brier and the yellow-jasmine clambered, holding Agnes in her lap, and trying, with such patient effort and with such a yearning expression upon her young face, to teach the child by the sense of touch what flowers were, those who passed by forgot for the moment that she was Mrs. Merton, the school-teacher, and thought of her with sympathy and pity as the young mother of a blind child.

For two years Mr. Cameron had adhered to his resolution, and kept his children from Grace's school. As he was a man of influence and high standing in the community, and it was known that he had long wanted to send them to a good school, and as Mrs. Merton had now established the claim of hers to be so considered, it was remarked that Mr. Cameron did not patronize it. Mr. Derby had never, of course, betrayed his conversation with Mr. Cameron upon that subject; but there were not wanting others who were willing to tell her why it was, and, while she could not blame him, still it stung her to the quick. She did not know Mr. Cameron; she had no personal knowledge of his genial temper, his kindliness, his warmth and cordiality of heart and manner, and she conceived him to be one of those proud sons of the Old Dominion, in whom the republican spirit of equality and fraternity had not yet been able to exterminate the inborn patrician element, who reposed with serene complacency upon his an-

cestral name and dignity, and would not sully either by giving countenance to the unnamed and the unknown. And while she sorely felt this peculiarity in her own individual case, yet to a certain extent she rather sympathized with the feeling than otherwise, and if this alone had been the cause of Mr. Cameron's discountenance (for such in effect it was), she could not altogether have despised it; but she knew that he had a deeper, a better reason than this. She had heard the circumstances of the family, that there was no mother to train and guide those little ones, and she could not but respect the father's anxiety and carefulness, even though in her own case she felt it to be undue and misjudged, to know who it was to whom he intrusted their education. On the other hand, Grace felt that two years' conscientious fulfillment of her duty had entitled her to the confidence of the community, and she could not but know that Mr. Cameron's silent disapprobation was very much to be deplored. All these things she revolved in her mind, but she never uttered them, not even to Mr. Derby. No human being knew that she had ever thought of Mr. Cameron or his children. Nor had he been altogether unmindful of her and her school. While he had the same misgivings as before with regard to her past history, and would still have been unwilling to receive her as an inmate of his family, yet, from what he had heard of Grace from Mr. Derby and others, and, indeed, from what he himself saw of her Sunday after Sunday in church, he was willing to believe that he would run no risk in confiding his children to her care. He deemed it absolutely necessary that they should now have, besides the knowledge to be acquired from books, that other training which children get in school; that friction of clashing spirits and interests which wears away the morbid sensitiveness of some, and teaches the selfishness of others that there are feelings and inclinations in the world besides their own to be consulted, and which gives to all a foretaste adapted to their age and capacity of those trials which manhood and womanhood must bring. So Mr. Cameron at last decided to send his children to Mrs. Merton's school, and accordingly one day, much to her surprise, he came and brought them. The interview between the teacher and her patron was brief, but it was satisfactory to both. He felt assured that he left his children with a lady, and she felt equally certain that in imagining Mr. Cameron distant and frigid and haughty, she had altogether misjudged him, for never had she seen greater kindness mingled with courtesy and dignity.

Every morning Mr. Cameron brought his children to school, and came for them again when they were dismissed for the day. All the kindliness of his nature had long ago gone out toward the

little blind child whom he had often watched in church, with her face all radiant whenever the organ struck up; and now, when he sometimes called at the school before it was dismissed, he would frequently take the child upon his lap and entertain himself with her until his children were ready to go. And so, before long, quite a friendship existed between them. Agnes very soon learned to recognize his step, and she could distinguish Mr. Cameron as readily by touching his hand as other children could by looking at his face. Agnes was a great pet among the scholars, and not one of them could ever let her pass without a kind word or a gentle touch. Nor was it surprising, for the little blind child was all light and sunshine except in her eyes. She was as happy and merry as a bird, and in the recess her laugh was often as loud and joyous as any of the rest. The motherly little Julia soon made Agnes her firm friend; and Grace, while she anxiously watched her little girl if any of the other children took her out to play, always confided her to Julia's care without a thought or an anxiety. After awhile, Julia and Eva wanted to take Agnes home with them, but to this the mother would not consent. Agnes was almost a baby, and the others were little children, quite too young to be intrusted with her; but one day Mr. Cameron himself came and promised to take care of her. The child was delighted, and afterward it became a common occurrence for Agnes to spend the day at Cameron Hall. Mr. Cameron often took her with him when he rode on horseback over his plantation, and tried to teach her with a patience scarcely less than that of the mother herself. Little Julia often begged her teacher to go home with her, but she never did, not even when, in process of time, the childish invitation was cordially seconded by the father. She always replied by saying:

"Thank you, but you must excuse me; I never visit."

One summer evening Grace was sitting on the porch with Agnes in her lap. The child had a strange fancy for flowers, not only for fragrant ones, but for them all. The mother had taught her to value them, and herself loved to see them about the child, and so Agnes almost always had a flower in her hand, or one pinned upon her bosom. The mother was now stringing a garland of jasmine blossoms for Agnes's head, such as all children love to wear, and Agnes herself was tracing with delicate touch the tiny scollops of the petals, and counting the stamens and pistils of one in her hand. While thus engaged, Mr. Derby came in at the gate. He was always welcome there, and Grace hastened to gather up the leaves and flowers scattered upon the bench, so as to give him a seat beside her. He had reached the

porch before she had finished, and told her to sit still and he himself would find a seat. Her work-basket was also on the bench beside her, and so was her open prayer-book; and, as he took it up to remove it, his eye rested upon the forty-second Psalm, that strange and beautiful commingling of complaint and comfort, of sorrow and support, of longing and fullness. Several verses were marked, and, as he read the mournful plaint, "all thy waves and storms are gone over me;" "why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?" he involuntarily looked full into her face. In that look there was no intrusive curiosity, no desire to surprise her into the betrayal of what she wanted to conceal; it was a look of sympathy, nothing more, but of sympathy so full, so tender, so compassionate, that it touched a chord whose vibrations she could not control. For the first time she was overpowered, and Mr. Derby looked on in silent surprise and sorrow as she bent her head down into the child's lap and wept bitterly, passionately. Agnes was bewildered and distressed. The storm of sorrow she could not see; but she could hear the bursting sobs, and could feel the throbbings of her mother's heart.

After awhile, the storm ceased. Her head was still buried in Agnes's lap, but she was quiet, except now and then a sob, which shook her whole frame.

Mr. Derby took the hand that fell at her side, and said, gently:

"My poor Grace! how I wish that I could help you!"

She raised her head, and pushing her hair nervously back from her temples, gazed at him almost wildly. She seemed trying to look into the very depths of his heart to see if she could trust him. Her lonely heart was starving for sympathy. She had borne her burden so long, and had so long shut up her grief in her own breast, that she felt ready to faint beneath the load. She looked long, and earnestly, and searchingly into the minister's face, and then murmured, rather to herself than to him:

"Yes, I can trust him."

And she did. There, in the gathering shadows, she unfolded the history of a life as dark as the twilight around her. Mr. Derby did not interrupt her; but when the sad story was ended, he only repeated in a low voice the familiar words:

"Put thy trust in God; for I will yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance!"

Old words! familiar words! but for all that, none the less full of comfort and of counsel, of support and of strength; and as such they went deep down into her soul.

When the minister was going away, she clasped his hand firmly, and looked at him earnestly, beseechingly, as she said :

“ You will keep my secret, Mr. Derby ? ”

And he answered :

“ Sacredly ! ”

CHAPTER III.

FROM early infancy Agnes had manifested a passionate love for music. She loved the harmony of any instrument, and the only temptation that had proved irresistible to the mother to revive the songs and music of her girlhood, was the enjoyment of the little blind baby who, before she could either speak or walk, would sit contented and happy for hours if her mother would only play and sing. As infancy merged into childhood, this love of music, while it did not abate, seemed to concentrate itself upon a single instrument—and organ-music became her passion. Often in church the children would smile, but older people looked almost with awe upon the blind face, so radiant with more than childish happiness as she listened to the organ, the first note of which always brought her to her feet, with her face turned toward the place whence the music came. Soon she wanted to touch the organ herself and see if she too could not bring out its harmonies ; and when she was scarcely six years old, her mother obtained permission for her to amuse herself at the organ in the church. “ To amuse herself ” was the mother’s literal meaning and expectation ; she little dreamed of the music that was hidden in that childish heart, nor did she know, until long afterward, what a blessed compensation for her blindness God had given Agnes, and that music would be to her instead of eyes. It soon became, not an occasional but a daily enjoyment for the child, who spent a part of every morning at the church. The children missed her day after day at school, and when they asked where she was, her mother always replied, with a smile of quiet satisfaction :

“ She is amusing herself at the organ. ”

Yes, the blind child had found a companion, a friend. She needed no teacher, for experience soon taught her the use of the instrument, and that was all she wanted. She cared not for the composition of others ; what she required, was a language and expression for what she felt in her own heart.

It relieved her mother of much anxiety when Agnes found this source of interest and pleasure. She felt assured that her little girl was safe from danger when she had sent her to the church under the care of the faithful servant who always accompanied her, and she knew that while thus employed, she did not feel the weariness and loneliness of her sad life. No! Agnes would never again be lonely, nor indeed was she, as her mother for a long time supposed, without other companionship in the church except that of her servant.

There was in the town a harmless idiot, known as "Silly Joe," whom the compassionate pitied, and the heartless jeered. He wandered about, all day long, with vacant stare, never receiving any positive unkindness, and happily unconscious that he was sometimes the subject of cruel ridicule. Soon after Agnes began to go to the church to play, Joe found his way there, attracted by sounds to which he was unaccustomed, and which pleased his ear. The poor idiot, senseless to all else, was interested in the music, and although incapable of appreciating the genius of the child-organist, still he liked the sweet sounds, and was, by degrees, attracted to the child, who was, in some way or other unintelligible to himself, the medium through which he enjoyed this pleasure. Gradually a friendship grew between them; and a sympathy, which neither could explain, and of which neither was conscious, bound these two together,—the blind child and the idiot boy. The little Agnes, in her simplicity, could not realize his deficiencies, especially since she could not see the face upon which the stamp of idiocy was so plainly written; and Joe, not knowing what blindness meant, was drawn to his new friend, not by any bond of conscious sympathy, but simply by her uniform kindness to him, and in obedience to a law which controls alike the rational and irrational creation.

One day Joe wanted to take Agnes's place at the organ, to make, as he said, "a pretty noise." Agnes laughingly assured him that she could make much better music than he; but Joe insisted, and, to gratify him, she yielded her place.

The result was, of course, just what might have been expected: there was a frightful burst of discord, from which even the idiot himself recoiled. Surprised and disappointed, he made repeated attempts with the same result, and because he could not understand the reason why her sounds were so pleasant, and his so disagreeable, he was irritated and annoyed. Agnes tried in her childish way to soothe and comfort him; but all in vain. At last, however, she thought of a new expedient, and exclaimed:

"Oh! I can tell you, Joe, how you can make this pretty noise,

as you call it. You cannot do it by yourself, but you can help me. Give me your hand."

She led him round the organ, and made the bellows-blower show him how to work the bellows.

"Now, Joe," she said, "if you will do this, we can make music together."

At first, Joe indignantly refused the monotonous labor; but Agnes's persuasions finally overcame him and he consented to try it. She called his attention to the fact that every failure to perform his duty was as fatal to the music as if she herself had ceased to play, and thus she convinced him that he was indeed not only helping to make the music, but that it could not be made without him. The poor idiot was delighted. He had found something to do; and every creature in the universe of God requires employment. From this time forth, whenever Agnes went to the church she found Joe waiting to help her "make music." He knew nothing of time: the morning and evening were alike to him, and he was ignorant of hours; but the same sort of instinct which recalls the lower animals home at certain times, made the idiot repair regularly to the church at the hour when Agnes might be expected there. Joe too enjoyed it, or rather the emotion which he experienced while performing his work was as near akin to pleasure as anything that he was capable of feeling; and an expression that seemed as it were a feeble reflection of satisfaction and contentment rested upon his face, as, hour after hour, he plied his monotonous labor.

Thus together, the idiot and the blind child made their music, and their respective pleasures were a faithful exponent of their respective afflictions. The child, in her blindness, sat with the veil upon her outward vision, and all earthly objects shrouded in impenetrable darkness, but her intellect was clear and undimmed, receiving ideas and acquiring knowledge, independent of external organs and without communication with the external world; the idiot, with his eyes open, but his intellect blinded, looked all day upon the beauties and wonders of the world around him, and was yet hopelessly, totally blind!

Truly there is a blindness deeper, darker, blacker, than that which veils the eyes!

As Agnes grew older, the feeling of compassion with which her mother had been accustomed to regard her gave way to one of grateful satisfaction, as she saw the child's evident enjoyment of her great pleasure, and became daily more and more convinced that it was one of which she would never grow weary. Besides this, Agnes was a companion for the mother, long before children usually are. Her blindness, and her living, as it were,

constantly in the atmosphere of those ennobling feelings and aspirations which alone can find expression through organ-music, seemed to lift her, in some respects, immeasurably out of childhood; and while she was in most things a thorough child, yet, whenever she was improvising her strange music, she seemed to her mother as belonging less to this lower world, and being in some way mysteriously linked with the angels rather than with the dwellers upon this lower earth.

Grace often found her ingenuity greatly taxed, and she was sometimes painfully perplexed in her efforts to teach Agnes; but there is nothing that so certainly insures success as interest in our work, and the mother was herself astonished at the facility that she finally acquired in imparting knowledge to her. As is always the case with the blind, Agnes had a very retentive memory. What others always saw, she had always to remember. The veil upon her eyes shut out from her mind the distracting influence of external things and threw her inwardly upon herself, so that she pondered her mother's teachings until they became indelibly impressed upon her memory. She was already familiar with much of the church service, and had memorized most of the collects. Chanting was a kind of music that she specially loved, and her mother soon found that in order to secure a quick and accurate memory of the Psalter, she only needed to adapt each portion of it to a particular chant.

The hour before the commencement of school in the morning, Grace devoted to Agnes, hearing her repeat a portion of the Psalter, a hymn, and her catechism. While doing this, her fingers were not idle, but were busily engaged upon some article of childish dress, which was none the less carefully elaborated, even though those blind eyes could never see its beauty.

She was thus engaged one morning, and Agnes stood beside her repeating a hymn. It was one that she often said, as she did now, voluntarily. Her face, usually so glad and bright, wore a solemn, sad expression, as she repeated the lines:

“No midnight shade, no clouded sun,
But sacred, high, eternal noon.”

There was still another verse, but she came to a full stop. The mother looked up, and the tears filled her eyes in sympathy with those that were slowly tracing each other down the child's cheeks.

Presently she wiped them away and said:

“Mother, does it really mean that there is no midnight in heaven, but that it is always day there?”

"Yes, my child, there is a verse in the Bible which says that there shall be no night there."

"That must be a pleasant home," the child answered, "a very pleasant home for those who are not blind; but oh, mother! it will be no day to me, for the darkness and the light are both alike to me."

For an instant the mother did not reply. Then she drew her child close to her and said:

"God be thanked, my darling, it will not be so there! Agnes, in heaven you will be no longer blind, and that eternal day will be to you fuller, brighter, and more glorious, because you have never seen even the glory of an earthly day!"

"Not blind in heaven! Oh, mother, do you, can you mean that in heaven I will see too?"

Oh, the rapture that lighted up that little blind face! It seemed as if a beam of that heavenly day had penetrated those sightless eyes, and made them radiant with the anticipation of its full, unclouded glory. Never was there a revelation of heaven more full of rapture than this promise of eternal light to a sunless life! Never can we, who know what the blessed sunshine is, realize the thrill with which that blind child heard of a cloudless day!

There was a pause, and presently Agnes asked:

"Mother, didn't you tell me once that they have music in heaven? Is it organ-music, mother?"

"The Bible tells us, Agnes, that the angels have harps in their hands."

"I wish it was the organ, mother," she answered thoughtfully; "its music is so deep that I don't only hear it, but I feel it too. I wish it was the organ!" she repeated in a disappointed tone.

"Never mind, my child," said Grace, "you will be perfectly satisfied with the music in heaven. It is an eternal song without a discord, and neither the ear nor the heart will ever grow weary of it."

"Eternal day! eternal music!" repeated Agnes thoughtfully. "Oh, what a happy heaven that must be!"

Nothing more was said. Agnes was satisfied, for the mind of the blind child-musician could grasp no fuller, deeper, or more satisfying thought of heaven than as a home of eternal day and eternal song!

As Agnes grew more skillful in the use of the organ, it became her mother's greatest pleasure to listen to her music. In the twilight hour, when the duties of the day were done, the mother and child were generally together in the church. Agnes needed

no light; and there was something in the subdued and quiet hour, and the peaceful shadow that rested upon the holy place, that seemed to the mother beautifully in unison with the music which the child loved most, and so she always chose this time to hear Agnes's music. Sometimes, while listening, Grace would dream pleasantly of the melodies of heaven; sometimes an unexpected strain would recall her with a painful thrill back to this earth; and then again, as she looked upon her child's upturned face, glowing with pleasure in the possession of a happiness which nothing could take from her,—there, in God's own house, the mother would thank Him that He had given her so much to gladden her life's long night.

It was late one evening when Grace and Agnes were in the church. She had been playing as was her wont, and with a sweetness which the mother fondly thought no earthly music could surpass, when all at once she stopped. Grace was accustomed to these abrupt pauses, and for some moments did not look round. When she did, there was something in Agnes's appearance and attitude which almost startled her.

She sat in a dreamy, abstracted state, seemingly unconscious where she was, with her ear strained in a listening attitude, as if she heard music, and with a fixed expression upon her face that was almost painful, as if some powerful thought or feeling were struggling for utterance. She was wondering if she could interpret by music one thought of which her little heart was full. Presently, with a nervous haste, her hand arranged the stops, and then she struck the chord. She shook her head with disappointment and dissatisfaction, and then she made a different combination. This time the chord responded to her feeling, and she went on. A deep swelling tide of harmony rose and fell, ebbed and flowed, until the whole air was tremulous with sweetest music. It was strange as it was beautiful; a commingling of a penitential wail with a song of praise, with the fervor and sweetness of the one without its sadness, and the richness and fullness of the other without its exultation. Agnes was now giving utterance to feelings for which she knew no words, but her music had evidently found for them a voice and expression which satisfied her heart. Grace listened and looked in silent wonder. The child's appearance and attitude were as full of expression as was her strange music; her face was lighted up, and for several moments after the strain had ceased, it still glowed with pleasure, as if the melody yet lingered in her heart. Presently Grace asked:

“What is that, my daughter?”

“That, mother,” she replied, “is the Song of the Redeemed,

that you were reading about this morning. That is something like the song that I expect to sing in heaven."

"Do you think, my daughter, that it is joyous, rapturous enough, for the Song of the Redeemed? Just think how very happy the Redeemed must be to find themselves safe in a home where there is no more trouble, or sorrow, or death, or sin."

"Yes, mother, but if they feel in heaven as I do now, they will sing the sweetest but not the loudest song when they are the happiest. You know when my heart feels the most, I don't play the loudest music; and I know that in heaven, where I won't be blind, and where I can sing, even with the angels, without making discord,—oh! I know that I will be too happy there to sing a loud song."

"But, Agnes, the Bible expressly says that the Song of the Redeemed is a very loud song, even 'as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great thunder.'"

"Yes, I know, but that is because so many sing it. Isn't it strange," she added dreamily, as if she were thinking aloud, "that we will all sing our own song at the same time, and yet there won't be any discord! How grand, how beautiful it will be!"

Grace made no reply, and they sat there in the silence of the deepening twilight all alone, as they thought, in the house of God. But another had been a listener and a witness, and had they been less occupied with their own thoughts, the acute ear of Agnes would have detected an approaching footstep, and Grace would have seen standing not far from her a stranger, leaning upon his cane, with face and figure immovable as a statue. Before he had awakened from the spell in which the music had bound him, the child's strange words had fallen upon his ear, and he was first aroused from his reverie by a suppressed scream, as Grace, leading her child carefully through the gathering darkness, came suddenly and unexpectedly upon him. Without a word of explanation or apology, he made way for them, and Grace, dragging Agnes along, hastened out of the church. When she found herself in the street, it was already quite dark, and she hurried home much more rapidly than was consistent with Agnes's comfort.

At last Agnes said, breathlessly:

"Mother, I am so tired. Please don't go so fast."

Grace stopped a moment for Agnes to take breath, and the stranger, who was close behind, now overtaking her, said respectfully:

"I owe you an apology, madam, first for intruding upon your privacy, and afterward for my seeming rudeness. I am a dear

lover of music, and in passing along the street was attracted by the sound of the organ, touched, as I thought, by no unskillful hand; and, unconscious of intrusion, I entered the church. What I did after I got there I do not know. Everything seems like a dream from which your exclamation, as you passed, first awakened me. I should have apologized then, if I had recovered myself in time, and I have followed you now, hoping for an opportunity to do so."

It was not to be expected that a mother could reject such an apology as this, even when offered by a less attractive stranger; but it was now tendered so respectfully, and with so much gentleness of manner, that Grace felt no hesitation in accepting the old gentleman's explanation. She was now obliged to walk more slowly, for Agnes was thoroughly tired, and the stranger accompanied them along the street.

Presently she asked:

"Who is this, mother? I never heard his voice before, and I like it; it is pleasant."

"He is a stranger, my daughter, who came into the church to hear your music."

"A stranger now, my little girl," said he, "but I do not intend to be so long. I love little children very much, and I love music as well, and to find both combined in one, will surely win my heart. If you will let me, I will be your friend,—will you?"

"Certainly, sir," she replied. "What is your name?"

"My name is Uncle John."

"Uncle John what?"

"Uncle John," he said: "nothing more. That is name enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; and must everybody call you Uncle John?"

"You must; and now, what must I call you?"

"My name, sir, is Agnes Merton; but everybody calls me only little blind Agnes."

"Blind!" exclaimed the stranger; "you blind! Surely that cannot be," he added, looking at Grace.

"It is true, sir," she answered; "she is blind."

"How then was it possible to teach her to play so beautifully, at her age?"

"She has never had an hour's instruction in her life. It is a natural gift, and to her an invaluable one; for with her love of harmony and her power to produce it, her life is rendered not only tolerable but positively happy, and while she is at the organ she never remembers that she is blind."

"A blind-child-musician!" repeated Uncle John, slowly, and

at intervals. Then he stooped down and put both his arms around her, and kissed her almost reverently, as he said :

"How I shall love this child !"

The mother's heart could not but open to the stranger who thus looked upon her child ; and when Uncle John proposed to lead Agnes, and she herself did not object, Grace yielded the little hand to him, and he led her carefully home.

When they reached the gate, Agnes said :

"Come in, Uncle John, I have not seen you yet."

He did not understand what she meant, but he went in with her and was soon seated in their little parlor. Grace went to get candles, but Agnes did not have to wait for the light to "see" Uncle John. As soon as he was seated, she went up to him and passed her hand gently through his hair, traced his features one by one, and paused after each, as if trying to picture it in her mind. She touched his hand, felt the size of his arm, and measured its length from the shoulder to the end of the fingers. Then she asked him to stand up, and her hand glided rapidly from the crown of his head to his feet.

"You are tall, Uncle John," she said.

"Yes, Agnes, I am quite a tall man. My eyes are dark hazel, my hair is quite gray, and——"

He checked himself and murmured sadly :

"What is the use of this ? colors are all alike to her !"

"What did you say, Uncle John ?"

"Nothing, child, except that if you cannot see me, I intend that you shall at least learn to love me. And will you let me come sometimes to the church and listen to your music ? It would be a great pleasure," he added, turning to Grace, who now came in, "if it would not be interfering."

Agnes hastened to reply :

"Oh no, Uncle John, it will not interrupt me in the least, and if you would like to listen I would rather you should come than not. I love the organ so much myself that I like all my friends to enjoy it too."

Not the least attractive characteristic of the child-musician was her unfeigned enjoyment of her own music. She loved it for itself, and in her simplicity was quite unconscious that it could excite either wonder or commendation. She never thought of herself when she was playing, any more than she did when she was talking ; in the one case she enjoyed the expression of her thoughts and feelings by words, and in the other by music, and she was not yet old enough to know that one was any rarer gift than the other ; she only knew which gave her most pleasure.

To Uncle John's request Grace made no reply. She could not

have refused it, and yet, in granting it, she felt that she would be giving up her greatest pleasure. She had greatly valued the freedom with which, there alone in the church, she was privileged to indulge feelings which elsewhere, and at all other times, were kept under restraint. That music always spoke to her heart, and she was accustomed to yield herself entirely to its influence, unchecked by the presence of a human being, for the blind child was of course no restraint. Now that her privacy was liable at any moment to be intruded upon, her twilight hour with Agnes would no longer be the goal of her thoughts all through the day, and for a moment Grace was selfish enough almost to regret that her child had made a new friend.

After he was gone, Agnes said :

“Mother, do you love Uncle John very much?”

“No, my daughter, not yet. I expect, however, soon to like him extremely, if, for no other reason, because I see that he is going to love you——”

“I love him already, mother, and am so glad that he loves music, because I can play for him. What is the reason that we never knew him before?”

“Because he has only lately come to Hopedale. I have seen him several times at church; but he is a stranger here, and I don’t think anybody knows him yet.”

“Is he going to live here, mother?”

“I do not know. All that I know about him is what he told us of himself as we came home, and you heard that.”

“Yes, but that is very little to know about anybody that you love. The next time he comes I will ask him to tell me all about himself, and I will tell him all about ourselves; that will be fair, won’t it, mother?”

Grace was thankful that the child could not see in her face the effect of her unconscious words. She thought how little Agnes knew of her own or her mother’s history, but she only said in reply :

“I think, my daughter, that it will be better to wait until Uncle John chooses to tell us his history. Perhaps he may not like to talk about it.”

“Why, mother? what objection could he possibly have?”

“I do not know, Agnes; perhaps he may have had a great deal of trouble in his life, and may not like to talk about it to strangers.”

“But, mother, we are not strangers,” persisted Agnes. “Don’t you know he said himself that we are friends, and of course if we are friends, he would rather tell us all about himself than not!”

Her heart had evidently been already won by the gentle kindness of the stranger, and with the freedom of childhood, she wanted at once to make herself acquainted with his past life. She could not understand or appreciate her mother's unwillingness to question him herself, but to prevent her from doing so, seemed to Agnes a most unreasonable restriction. She could not help showing her disappointment, when her mother said :

"Agnes, your mother knows what is right and proper much better than you do, and you must not ask Uncle John anything of his past life or history. I do not know that he would have any objection to telling you, but he might have, and you must not do it."

The tone was gentle, but it was firm and positive; and however disappointed Agnes might be, and however unreasonable might seem the command, yet she dared not disobey it. The next time that Uncle John came, the temptation to gratify her curiosity was strong, and nothing but the fear of her mother's serious displeasure prevented her from asking the forbidden question; but afterward, she soon forgot in her pleasant and unrestrained intercourse with him that she had not always known and loved him.

In the course of months he became a regular and constant visitor at the cottage, and after awhile Grace became so accustomed to his presence when Agnes was at the organ, that she did not object to it. Indeed, he was scarcely a restraint, for he seemed so absorbed in the music, or else in some associations and memories that it might have awakened, that he was oblivious to things around him.

Uncle John was a great lover of children, and was soon claimed by the children of Hopedale as their special property. It was no uncommon sight to see him walking along the street with a child holding each hand and one or two others clinging to the skirts of his coat, all chattering together, and he apparently as much interested and as much of a child as any of them. If he happened to be passing by the school at recess, the sight of him was sure to awaken a shout of entreaty from dozens of little voices that he would come in and have "a real nice play," an invitation which he rarely refused, not only because he liked to make them happy, but because he really enjoyed their society, for he was accustomed to say that he felt himself a better man for hours, after he had been in the atmosphere of childhood. It was at the school that he became acquainted with Julia and Eva Cameron, both of whom soon found a soft spot in old Uncle John's heart. The "little woman," timid almost to shyness with strangers, was very soon won over, by some unaccountable mag-

netism, to perfect freedom and unreserve with him; while the little Eva, the sunbeam, was, if possible, brighter and happier when she was holding his hand or sitting in his lap listening to a story.

But while he seemed actually to reverence childhood and to love all children, yet for the blind child he had a peculiarly tender affection. His kind heart was touched with a feeling of sorrow and sympathy for her infirmity, and was, at the same time, won by her patience and cheerfulness. There was no repining or complaining in her childish nature. She accepted whatever pleasure her darkened life was susceptible of, and did not murmur that she could not have more. And while there was a jealousy and rivalry among the other children as to whom Uncle John loved best, they all gave way to the blind child. She was the acknowledged favorite, and none disputed her right or envied her supremacy. Uncle John found the friendship of childhood the best passport of recommendation to those of his own age, and the hearts of parents soon opened to the stranger who had found his way at once to those of the children; it was not very long before he seemed to be as well known and as much beloved in Hopedale as if he had always lived there, and the old and the young alike forgot that Uncle John had ever been a stranger.

Uncle John did not, however, at once become acquainted with Mr. Cameron. Grace Merton had not misjudged him, when she supposed that there was a considerable leaven of the aristocratic element lurking in his nature; she had only judged him wrongfully, when she imagined that it had attained undue proportions. He had a certain pride of birth and name, and if it did occasionally tempt him to exaggerate their importance and value, yet it was prevented from becoming haughtiness or offensive self-conceit by that strict justice which never allowed him to forget or disregard the claims of others. And while some might have thought that Mr. Cameron laid too much stress upon birth and station, yet none could deny that he was as ready as any other man to see and acknowledge merit, and to give it the preference when the two came in conflict. It was owing perhaps to these feelings and opinions of Mr. Cameron that the Hall was among the last houses where Uncle John was received upon intimate terms. He was a stranger, none knew whence he came or who he was, and Mr. Cameron did not seek him out. Like many others, he too only learned to know him through his children, and it was at last at the instigation of his "little woman" that he became acquainted with him. It seemed so remarkable to her father that the timid, shrinking little Julia could be so soon won, and Uncle John appeared to have taken such firm, fast hold upon her heart,

that Mr. Cameron felt persuaded that there must be something in his character to admire and respect. Nor did he find himself mistaken; the same simplicity and gentleness and warmth of heart that had attracted the children, awakened Mr. Cameron's esteem and confidence. The truth was, that Uncle John was a remarkable exemplification of the truth, that a man may have much in common with a child without losing one atom of his manhood; that the gentleness, the humility, and the kindly nature which are so beautiful in childhood, are by no means inconsistent with the firmness, the energy, the self-reliance which become the man; and that he who can be the companion, the associate, the friend of a child, is not therefore unfit to be the companion, the associate, the friend of a man. And so it came to pass after awhile, that the friend of the little Julia, Walter, and Eva became no less the friend of their father, no less welcome to the head of the family than he was to the little folks, who grouped themselves around him, generally coming in for a full share of his conversation and attention, and yet quite content to hold his hand or his coat in silence and listen, when told by their father to sit still and not to interrupt the conversation.

Uncle John had been a long time in Hopedale before he learned that Grace Merton had not always lived there, and that there was a painful mystery thrown over the early part of her life. His kind heart had been early drawn toward the mother of the blind child, and what was, at first, only sympathy, became afterward respect and admiration for her uncomplaining patience and quiet serenity. He saw that she was sad, but thought that there was quite enough to make her so in the object of her love and solicitude, and in the poverty which rendered necessary an amount of labor exceeding her strength; but when he learned that there was some cause of sorrow underlying and even exceeding this, his only reply was:

"Poor Grace! if she has more than that blind child upon her heart, it must be heavy indeed!"

It was from Mr. Cameron that he first heard the circumstances attending Mrs. Merton's arrival in Hopedale. Mr. Cameron had frankly told him his own misgivings, but had also added that his subsequent acquaintance with her, and knowledge of her character, had silenced them all.

"It cannot be her fault," he said thoughtfully; "and yet I wish, for her sake, that the mystery could be cleared up."

"Her fault!" repeated Uncle John, in surprise; "never, sir, never! There is sorrow in her face, but not remorse; you may read pain there, but not guilt. No, sir, not her fault!"

The subject dropped; it was the first and last time that either of them ever alluded to Grace Merton's early life.

CHAPTER IV.

As at Cameron Hall, so also at the cottage, Uncle John now came and went at his pleasure, with only one stipulation, that he should not interrupt the hours devoted to Agnes's instruction; and as Grace was in school in the morning and teaching Agnes in the afternoon, his visits were limited to the evening, and he generally came at tea-time or immediately afterward.

One evening, about twilight, he came in the midst of a pouring rain. Grace was telling Agnes fairy tales, a poor compensation, she said, for her usual enjoyment at that hour.

Uncle John sat down, and drawing her up to him, said kindly:

"You have been disappointed very often lately, my daughter, in going to the church. So much rain during the last fortnight has been unfortunate for you, hasn't it?"

"Yes, sir; there have been several days lately that I have not touched the organ at all, and then I always feel lonely."

"You will find, my child," said her mother, "that the winter weather, now approaching, will be a much greater interruption than the occasional summer rains have been. It is so cold in the church that I cannot permit you to go there this winter."

"Oh, mother! why not? I went there a great deal last winter."

"Yes, Agnes, I yielded to you then, when my judgment told me that it was wrong, and the consequence was, that we both suffered from it. The doctor says that I must never let you do it again. I am sorry, my child, as much so as you are, for I love your music almost as much as you do; but I must do what is right."

Agnes's cheerfulness was all gone now. That organ had become as much a part of her daily life as the air that she breathed, and child that she was, she felt not only that she could not be happy without it, but that she could not live without it.

The mother saw the pain that she inflicted, and so did Uncle John, who said:

"My daughter, how would you like to have an organ here in the house, that you could play on whenever you pleased, in winter and summer, in rain and sunshine?"

"I should like it very much, Uncle John, if it was a great big organ like the one in the church, with just as many stops, and

with that beautiful, deep pedal bass; but not without. Mother once promised that when she had money enough she would buy me a little one, like that Mr. Derby has in his parlor; but I don't want that. I can't tell half that I feel on that. No, I love the church organ, and am willing to go through the rain or the cold to play on it. I was not cold a single time last winter while I was there."

"Well, suppose that you could have one here at home just as large as that; how would you like it?"

"How would I like it!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Uncle John, I would rather have it than anything, yes, than everything in the world besides!"

Grace looked inquiringly at Uncle John, who said:

"In which room, mother, shall we put Agnes's organ?"

"You are not in earnest, Uncle John," she said; and then added, deprecatingly: "I am sorry that you have put that notion into her head, for she thinks that you are in earnest, and she is not accustomed to disappointment."

"Earnest!" he exclaimed. "I never was more in earnest in my life. If you will give her a place to put it, I promise that she shall have an organ with four more stops than the one in the church, and just as many pedals."

"Oh, Uncle John, what shall I do, what shall I do to thank you?" she exclaimed, rapturously. "When shall I have it? Mother, where will you put it?"

"Uncle John," said Grace, "do you know what you have promised? Have you any idea of the expense of such an instrument?"

"Yes, I know all about it," he answered; "but I am willing to buy it to make her as happy as she will be."

"But, Uncle John, that is too expensive a present for you to give Agnes. I am afraid——"

"That you cannot afford it," he said, finishing her sentence; "but that is my look-out, not yours. Don't you think, Agnes, that your mother might allow me to spend my money as I please?"

"Yes, sir, indeed I do, especially if you want to buy an organ. When shall I have it—next week?"

"Not quite so soon as that, my daughter, for I will have to write for it, and then, even if it is already made, it will have to be boxed up and sent out. I am afraid that you will have to wait several weeks, and perhaps longer. But your mother has not yet said where it is to stand."

"There is no other place for it," she replied, "except this room; but I am very willing to give up my parlor to Agnes's organ."

"This house is so small, Agnes," said Uncle John, "that it will not sound so well here as in the large church."

"Yes, sir, to me it will, for I will be just as near it in one place as in the other."

"That is true," he replied; "and as it is for your own special use, if you are satisfied, the rest of us ought to be. I will write and order it this very night. I wish that I could have it made in Germany, where they make such sweet, rich-toned instruments. Oh, Agnes, what exquisite pleasure it would give you to hear some of the organs in the Old Country, played by those wonderful musicians!"

But Agnes cared not at that moment to hear any musician in the world. She was so delighted at the idea of being the sole possessor of a large organ, that all other earthly pleasures seemed to sink into insignificance.

She sat in silence a little while, and then said, thoughtfully:

"Uncle John, you must love me a great deal; what makes you,—because I am blind?"

"No, my daughter, I feel sorry for you because you are blind; but I should not love you for that alone."

"Well, what is the reason, then?"

"Because you are a lovable child. You are gentle, affectionate, and obedient, and you bear your blindness cheerfully and patiently."

"Is that all, Uncle John?"

"No, Agnes, not all," he answered thoughtfully, almost sadly.

"Well, tell me the rest," she persisted.

"Suppose I tell you a tale, daughter," he said, "would you like it?"

"Very much, sir. Mother was telling me one when you came in. I like tales next to music."

He seated her in his lap, and taking her hand, said:

"A great many years ago, probably before your mother was born, there lived a warm-hearted affectionate youth, full of life, and hope, and happiness. He loved devotedly a young lady, who had promised to be his wife, and whose sincerity and truthfulness he never doubted. She had told him that she would marry him as soon as he left college; and when the time was near at hand, and his heart was brimful of joy, he received a letter from a friend, saying that she had suddenly and most unexpectedly married another man, and gone far away to a distant country. It was a cruel blow, and he felt not only distressed, but bitter too. He had trusted and believed her, and he thought that if she

could so deceive him, that there could be no truth or honesty in anybody else, and so he grew morose and discontented. Once he loved and trusted everybody, but now he hated all the world. He wanted no more friends, for he was afraid that as soon as he began to love them, they would deceive and disappoint him too. He wanted to get as far as possible from the scene of his wretchedness, and so he went over the ocean to a far distant land. For years he wandered about without any home, without any friends. He would not return to his old home, because everything there would remind him painfully of his former happiness; and sometimes he felt so bitter that he longed for some corner of the world where nobody lived, and where he might spend the rest of his life all alone. He was sadly changed from what he had been as a boy; and in the wretched, embittered man, nobody could have recognized the bright, cheerful, kind-hearted youth. At last, in his wanderings, he went to a large city in South America, and stayed there some time; but after awhile he grew tired there and wanted to go somewhere else. He was restless now, and could not stay very long in one place. But he did not know where else to go. He had been to Europe and did not care to go back so soon; and one day, while trying to think of some place where he would like to go, he suddenly determined to go back to his old home. Several years had passed since he left there; he had found that traveling about and living among strangers could not make him forget his misery, and he thought that perhaps the old home where he had played as a boy, and the companions of his boyhood, might, after all, comfort him more than anything else. At any rate, he determined to try it, and so he got on board a ship to sail home. It was not a steamship, and it took a long time to make the voyage. There were but few passengers, and these he avoided. He used to go and sit all day long on the deck and watch the waves, and think bitterly what a happy man he might have been, and how wretched his life had been made by one single act of another.

"There was on the ship a little child about three years old, whom he first noticed playing about the deck, full of life and happiness. He did not speak to her, but sometimes he found himself watching her instead of looking out upon the ocean; and, without knowing it, he became interested in her, and occasionally forgot himself and his troubles in seeing her brightness and happiness. She was not afraid of strangers, and, after some days, she became so much accustomed to his presence in the same spot, that she played around the place where he was sitting, just as she would have done if he had not been there. One day, as she passed by, he held out his hand to her without saying a word.

She hesitated a moment, looked him full in the face, and then came up fearlessly and laid her little hand in his. This was their introduction, and from that moment they were friends. Every day afterward she came regularly to him, and while he was trying to entertain and amuse her, he became interested himself, and at last he began really to love the little child. When he first found out that he was beginning to love her, he tried hard not to do it, for he had made a foolish vow that he would never again love anybody in the world; but this little child was so sweet and innocent that he could not help it, and then, too, he comforted himself with the thought that his little child-friend was too young to deceive him.

"One day he asked her name, and she replied :

" 'They call me Lily.' "

"It was a sweet name, and suited her well, for her heart was as pure as a lily, and she was as fair, and she always wore a white dress. Yes, the friendless stranger loved the little Lily; he loved her more and more every day, until at last he felt glad to know that he could love something, and his heart began to warm and glow with kindly feelings, as it had done years before.

"One day she looked up at him, and said :

" 'Uncle John' (he had taught her to call him so), 'why don't you laugh and run about as I do?'

" 'Because I don't want to do it, Lily,' he answered.

" 'But why don't you want to?'

"He did not think that she would understand him, and he said :

" 'Because I am not happy, Lily, as you are. Nobody loves me, and I don't love anybody but you.'

" 'Nobody loves you!' she repeated, her large blue eyes wide open with surprise; and, shaking her head, she added: 'then, Uncle John, you can't be good!'

" 'Why not, child?' he asked.

" 'Because mamma says that when I am good everybody loves me, and when I am bad nobody loves me.'

" 'Where is your mamma, Lily?'

" 'Up there!' she answered, pointing to the bright blue sky above.

"They were simple words, spoken by a little unconscious child; but they smote the man to his very heart, and that night, long after she was asleep, he sat on the deck, and seemed still to hear her saying: 'you can't be good.' He thought how he was wasting his life, and throwing away a great deal of happiness that he might enjoy, just because he had been once disappointed, and he almost resolved then that he would begin at once to be

cheerful and useful. But it is hard to break bad habits, and he had been too long sour and morose to change all at once. As the time passed on, Lily and her friend were more constantly together. She would run to him the moment that her nurse brought her on deck in the morning, and would sit in his lap or by his side all day until the nurse insisted upon her taking her accustomed exercise, and then she would take Uncle John's hand, saying that he must go too. When they had walked together up and down the deck until she was tired and her cheeks were glowing with the roses that the fresh sea air had brought out, then he would lead her to the bow of the ship, and, burying himself in a sail, would wrap his blanket round her to keep her warm and comfortable, and tell her stories. After awhile she found out that he could sing, and then she gave him no rest until he sang for her. He did not like to do it, for the last time he had ever sung was with the lady who had so cruelly disappointed him; but she would not be refused, and as she loved music dearly, he had to sing for her every day. Her next demand was that he, instead of her nurse, should hear her prayer at night, and so when she grew sleepy, there in the saloon, in the midst of card-playing and dice-rattling, the child would sink upon her knees and repeat her little prayer, and then she would climb up into his lap and fall asleep in his arms, listening to his song.

"He had once played the flute, and in his days of happiness it had been a great pleasure; but he had not touched it for years. But he still loved his old flute, and always carried it with him, for it seemed like an old friend. One day Lily was in his stateroom and saw the case in which he kept it. Her curiosity was at once awakened to know what was in it; and as soon as he opened it, she exclaimed, joyfully:

"'Oh, the flute! play on it, Uncle John; I love it very much, and papa always plays for me.'

"'Where is your papa, Lily?' he asked.

"'He is at home.'

"'What is his name?'

"'He is named papa: please play for me, Uncle John, won't you?'

"And he did; he took the flute out of the case where it had been for so many years; and he and Lily went to their old place upon the deck. The first note fell painfully upon his ear and heart, for it recalled both his past happiness and his present sorrow; but by degrees it seemed to soothe and quiet his feelings, and he loved to play as much as Lily loved to listen.

"He revived the old tunes that were the favorites of his boyhood, and the clear tones of Uncle John's flute sounded very

sweetly, as, at the twilight hour or by moonlight, he used to play for Lily, when the air was so still that the music was wafted far over the quiet waters and died away in the sweetest of murmurs.

"Days and weeks passed by, and the voyage was at last almost over. Other passengers began to count with pleasure the few remaining days, and Uncle John alone looked forward with regret to the time when they should reach the land. The society of his child-friend had become almost a necessity to him; he felt himself growing to be a better man in the pure atmosphere of her innocence; and he dreaded the separation, not only on account of the pain, but also because he dreaded a relapse into his former moodiness and discontent, out of which she had gradually drawn him. He now not only loved the little Lily, but he began almost to reverence her, and he felt that if he should ever recover his former kindness of heart and feeling, that he would owe it to this child's unconscious influence.

"He knew nothing of her except her name, and that she had been sent by her father, under the care of her nurse, to his mother in the United States. They traveled together as far as Richmond, and there they separated; he to go to his home in another part of Virginia, and she to her grandmother in South Carolina.

"When the nurse found out where he was going, she gave him a small package, containing, she said, two miniatures, one of the child and the other of her mother, which she requested him to give to Mrs. Ellsworth, Lily's grandmother. The name fell like a thunderbolt upon Uncle John's heart. Strange was it that the child of Lucy Ellsworth should be the first to touch with healing balm the wound that the mother had made! Strange that the child should so sweetly comfort him whom the mother had so cruelly wronged! Strange that the heart which had been denied the mother's love, should thus as it were seek to compensate itself by gaining the affection of the child!

"When he gave the package to Mrs. Ellsworth, he did not ask to see the mother's picture, but he begged to look at the child's. It was a correct and beautiful likeness, and he had it copied and wore it all the time.

"He had also been the bearer of a message to Mrs. Ellsworth, that after Lily had spent some time in South Carolina, she would come to visit her other grandmother in Virginia; and Uncle John looked, and hoped, and longed for her to come. Months passed away, and still she did not come, and finally, after he had stayed there a year, the old restless feeling returned, and he wanted to travel again.

"Time had somewhat healed his wounded heart, and he thought

of his early love no longer with bitterness, but with that forgiveness which death ever exacts and receives. He thought of her in her early grave in a foreign land, and resentment dared not pursue her there. He went to Europe, and this time found much to interest him. He led a sort of half-roving, half-settled life—sometimes sojourning weeks and sometimes months in a place, as his fancy dictated; but he no longer shut himself out from society, and he formed many pleasant acquaintances and some strong friendships. He did not intend to live in Europe; but his father died unexpectedly, and as he had no brothers and sisters, and his mother had been long dead, he felt that the last tie had been sundered that bound him to this country, and he determined to stay there as long as he pleased, and perhaps to live there.

“Often did he think of Lily, and wondered what had become of her. He did not like to think of her as growing out of childhood, but he loved to picture her still as the little child of long-ago. When he went to Rome, he had her miniature copied again by one of the best artists there; and in all the celebrated picture-galleries of Europe, he saw nothing which was to his eye and to his heart so beautiful as the little picture, that he always wore, of his child-angel.

“Many, many years passed away, and Uncle John grew old, and he began again to think of his home. It may be pleasant to wander about in other lands and among other scenes when we are strong and full of life; but when old age comes, and our hair is gray and we begin to fail, we all want to go home to die. So it was with Uncle John. He came home, but, alas! it was not home to him now. The old homestead was not the same, for he missed the father and mother who had made it home to him in boyhood. Old friends were dead, and their children, strangers to him, had taken their places. Mrs. Ellsworth was dead and her family broken up and scattered in distant homes. He inquired for Lily, but none knew anything of her. The old man could not stay there, so he wandered again, and at last found himself in a quiet mountain-girt village. It was a sweet place for a home, but it was not his; it was full of strangers, and he was lonely. He was walking one evening about twilight, when, as he passed a church, he heard a strain of sweet music that stole down to his very heart. He went into the church—But, Agnes, you know the rest of the story; you know that the old wanderer has at last found a home and friends, and another sweet little child-companion.”

“Why, Uncle John, do you really mean that you yourself are the young man and the old man of this story?”

"Yes, Agnes. I have told you the story of my life."

"And this then is the reason that you love little children so much, because they make you think of her,—is that it?"

"Yes, my daughter, I love all children, for I feel that I owe to childhood a debt that I can never repay."

"I am glad that something makes you love me, Uncle John," she answered in a disappointed tone; "but I would a great deal rather that you should love me for myself, than because I remind you of some other child."

"I do love you for yourself, Agnes. Didn't I tell you just now that I love you because you are gentle, and affectionate, and cheerful?"

"Yes, Uncle John, but don't you recollect the first time that you ever saw me, you kissed me, and said that you were going to love me very much; and then you did not know whether I was gentle and affectionate or not?"

"Yes, but I know now, daughter, and I love you now for your own self alone; but surely you can have no objection to reminding me of my other little friend, have you?"

"No, sir; but I cannot see how I can remind you of her—she was a very little child, and she was not blind."

"But she was a musical child, Agnes; and this was perhaps, after all, the strongest attraction that drew me toward you before I had learned to love you for yourself. She loved music so much that I always think of her as a little musician; and whenever I hear music I can see her bright face as it used to look when she was listening to the flute. Yes, daughter, although you are in many respects so unlike her, yet you often remind me of her, and not least of all in your great love for the old Uncle John, so much like her love for the young Uncle John. Sweet little Lily!" he added musingly: "how I would like to know if she is still living, if she is happy, and if her womanhood has fulfilled the promise of her childhood."

"If she were living, Uncle John, and you knew where to find her, would you leave us and go to live with her?"

"No, Agnes, I expect to stay where I am the rest of my life. If Lily is living, she is now a grown woman, as old or perhaps older than your mother. She has formed other ties, and most probably has no recollection at all of him who remembers her so well. If she were to meet me now it would be as a stranger, with no interest in me, no affection for me. Perhaps, after all, it is better that I should never see her again. She might disappoint me in appearance and character, and I would not like to have the sweet image now impressed upon my memory effaced. Look at it, Grace: isn't it a lovely picture?"

He opened a little gold case, looked at it a moment with a half audible sigh, and then gave it to Grace.

It was a radiant little face in a setting of roseate and amethyst clouds; and, but that it had no wings, it might have been mistaken for one of those cherubs on which Raphael's genius was accustomed lovingly to expend itself.

"It is very beautiful," said Grace, looking earnestly at it.

"Uncle John, I want to see it too," said Agnes.

He tried patiently to describe the form and features, but he well knew that words could not paint the picture upon her mind. She, however, was satisfied, as she always was, and if her idea of it was faint and imperfect, she was at least happily unconscious how very far it fell short of the perception of those who are blessed with sight.

"Is she in a white dress, Uncle John?"

"There is no dress in the picture, Agnes. There is nothing but her little face, with soft clouds all around it, and her white, beautiful neck, and her round, dimpled arms, on one of which her cheek rests."

"She looks, indeed," said Grace, "like a child-angel."

"Yes, Grace, so I designed it to be, for she had truly been a child-angel to me, in taking the bitterness out of my poisoned life and in drawing the sting from my wounded heart. She could not make me altogether a happy man, yet ever since I knew her, I seem to have regained the kindlier feelings of my youth, have been much less soured, and distrustful, and suspicious, and have loved children with an affection amounting almost to reverence. I feel that I owe to my brief intercourse with her a change in the whole tone and current of my thoughts. I actually shudder when I think what a morose, embittered, misanthropic old man I should now be if I had gone on as I had begun. By this time I should have been intolerable to myself and to everybody else. As it is, I am a very bearable old Uncle John,—don't you think I am, Agnes?"

"I think you are the very best old Uncle John in the world," she answered, and added feelingly: "do you know, Uncle John, that I have not felt half so blind since I knew you?"

His eyes moistened at this simple acknowledgment of the place that he occupied in the child's heart, and his soul was stirred at the thought of being light to her darkness, and pleasure to her loneliness.

Presently he said:

"Agnes, if I were to hear now that my little child-angel was still upon this earth, and had grown up to be an angel-woman, I would not go to live with her now. I would stay with you."

"Thank you for that, Uncle John," she said earnestly. "I would rather have that promise than anything that you could give me; yes, even than the great beautiful organ that you have promised me."

"You shall have both," he said; "and all that I ask in return is, that you shall love me, and play for me on the organ whenever I ask you."

"I shall always be glad to do that. I wish I had it now, for I love and thank you so much this minute, that I am sure I could play for you the sweetest strain that I ever played in my life."

"No, you would not, Agnes, at this hour of the night, for I would not stay to listen to it. Do you know what time it is? It is after eleven o'clock, and you ought to have been in bed and fast asleep two hours ago. Good night."

"Good night, Uncle John. Thank you for your story; above all, thank you for the promise of an organ. I know that I shall be all night playing 'thank you, kind Uncle John,' in my dreams upon my great big new organ."

CHAPTER V

It was late in November, and Agnes had been several weeks before prohibited from going any more into the cold church, when her heart was gladdened by the arrival of her own organ. Its power and sweetness even exceeded her expectations, and it had several stops with which she was unacquainted, and a rich, deep pedal bass that thrilled her soul with delight. She was now quite independent of society, for the organ was companion enough; and now that she had access to it at all hours, her love for it was fast becoming an uncontrollable passion.

Joe was now entirely domesticated in the cottage, which had become his home. The tie that bound him to Agnes had grown stronger day by day, until at last he was not contented to be her companion only at the organ, but he followed her constantly and everywhere. He did not talk to her—for he rarely spoke to any one—nor was he interested in her conversation, for he did not understand anything that she talked about; but he seemed to enjoy a placid contentment when he was either sitting or standing by her looking into her face. The mother had learned to

regard the poor idiot with a different feeling from that she had toward him at first. It was now not only compassion, but affection too, that she felt for one whose nearest approach to pleasure, in a dreary and monotonous life, was in the presence of her afflicted child; and Joe's devotion to Agnes had, unconsciously to himself, secured to him, in the person of her mother, the kindest and gentlest of friends. She had finally taken him into her own home to guard and shield his defenseless life, and he now seemed as necessary a part of her family circle as was the child herself. Agnes was sincerely attached to him. As soon as she became old enough to understand his condition, her mother told her all about it, and the sympathy thus awakened only served to deepen her affection for her faithful follower. "To make music," as Joe termed it, seemed now indeed the business of their lives, and the mother watched Agnes's passion with a feeling of mingled anxiety and pleasure, glad that she had an unfailing source of interest and amusement, and yet fearful lest both mind and body might in the end be sacrificed to her one absorbing passion. She pleaded, and the doctor commanded that there should be less music and more exercise; but Agnes was incorrigible. Julia and Eva tried to tempt her with the attractions of the Hall; but there was now an enjoyment in her cottage home which Cameron Hall, with all its comfort and luxury, could not afford. For a long time, Uncle John refused to join in the general remonstrance. He said:

"Let the child alone, it will not always be so. She is studying now, and learning the use of those unfamiliar stops; but by the time that she has learned to control this instrument as she did the one in the church, the novelty will have worn off and she will play in moderation."

But Uncle John proved no true prophet. Week after week, and month after month passed away, but she did not play with the expected moderation. During the winter, when it was too cold and disagreeable for her to exercise, her mother indulged her; but when the spring opened, and the genial air made it both pleasant and necessary for her to walk every day, Grace found her incorrigible. She had now become so wedded to her music, that her mother found that the only way to interest her in her lessons was to attend to them all in the morning before she permitted her to touch the organ. At last her maternal anxieties were thoroughly aroused; for she could not but see the pale cheeks and the languid step that pleaded so strongly, but in vain, for fresh air and healthful exercise. She stood one day watching Agnes as she sat in her accustomed place, and hesitated whether or not she would interrupt the beautiful strain and

the child's evident enjoyment of it; but she felt it to be her duty, and, going up to her, she laid her hand upon her shoulder and said :

"Come, my daughter, I am going to see Mrs. Derby now, and I want you to go with me. It is a long time since you were there, and she asked me the other day why you had not been."

"Oh, mother," she answered, "I am so sorry that you spoke to me just then. There was such a sweet strain of music in my heart, and I was just going to play it; but I have lost it now."

The mother's heart yearned toward the little blind musician; she felt that she was asking her to resign a pleasure, of which she, in the possession of all her faculties, could not conceive; and while her judgment condemned her, she could not help saying :

"I am sorry, my child, that I interrupted you. Go on with your music, and perhaps the beautiful strain will come back. Another day will do just as well for the visit to Mrs. Derby."

The walks and the visits had been gradually given up, and at last Grace felt that she must interfere, even if she were obliged to resort to maternal authority; but willing to try all other means first, she determined to enlist Uncle John's influence.

She told him her difficulty; and the first evening that he came afterward, he stood at the parlor door and listened some minutes in silence. When the music ceased, he entered the room, and Agnes recognized his first footstep, and said :

"Are you here, Uncle John? When did you come in?"

"A few minutes ago, just before you began that last strain."

"Wasn't it sweet, Uncle John? That music has been in my heart for the last half hour, but I could not say it until this minute; but didn't the organ say it sweetly?"

"Yes, my daughter, the strain was wonderfully sweet, but it was wonderfully sad too."

"Sad, Uncle John! why, how could that be? It was no sad feeling that was in my heart, and there was nothing sad in the music to my ear."

"I don't know what you intended to say through the organ, my child, but I know what it said to me. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, sir."

"It said to me, 'Uncle John, you did very wrong when you gave Agnes that organ.'"

Even the sightless eyes expressed amazement as she asked :

"Uncle John, what do you mean?"

"Come here and I will tell you. I cannot talk to you there."

He led her away from the organ, and, seating himself in a large arm-chair, took her in his lap and said :

“Agnes, are you glad that I gave you that organ?”

“Glad, Uncle John! it makes me so happy, so very happy, that I don’t want anything else in the world.”

“Would you be surprised if I should tell you that I am very sorry that I gave it to you?”

“Yes, sir,” she answered, confidently. “You love to be kind to me, and you love to see me happy, and I believe you are just as glad that you gave it to me as I am.”

“I was at first, but now I am not.”

“What makes you say that, Uncle John?”

“Listen to me and I will tell you. I gave it to you to be an amusement, a recreation, and not the business of your whole life. You do nothing else now but sit there from morning until night. You do not sleep enough; you do not exercise at all; you do not visit at all; and sometimes you do not even take time to eat your meals as you ought to do. You cannot see how pale your cheeks are; you cannot see how frail and delicate you look; but your mother and all your friends see it, and beg you to give up some of your amusement, and do what they know is so necessary for you. Now, Agnes, if that organ makes you lose your health, I shall be very sorry that I gave it to you; but if, worse than that, it makes my little obedient and docile child willful and selfish, and unwilling to give up one hour of her pleasure for the sake of her mother and her friends who love her so much, then, my daughter, of course I shall regret that I gave it to you.”

Agnes did not reply, but the great tears began to roll down her cheeks, and presently she laid her head on Uncle John’s shoulder and cried and sobbed.

Uncle John felt distressed, but he did not comfort her. Presently her mother came in and looked inquiringly at him, and he said:

“Let her alone now. I am only administering a little medicine, bitter but wholesome.”

Grace sat down, troubled and perplexed. Seldom during Agnes’s life had the patient and indulgent mother either spoken harshly to her herself, or allowed others to do it, and now it wrung her heart to hear those sobs and to see that childish grief.

After awhile, Agnes said:

“Uncle John, I did not mean to be selfish, I only——” and again she broke down utterly.

“No, my little daughter, you did not intend to be selfish; but let us see if you have not really been so. You would rather play the organ than to do anything else. Your mother asks you to walk with her, but you tell her that you would rather play; so she walks alone and you play on. Is not that selfishly preferring

your own pleasure to hers? Mr. Cameron, and Julia, and Eva have always been very kind to you. They love to have you visit the Hall, and when you go and want Eva to play on the piano for you, she never tells you that she is too busy, or would rather do something else; but she will sit and play for you as long as you like to listen. But now you prefer to stay at home with the organ, and all their entreaties cannot persuade you to go to the Hall. When your mother first came here a stranger, Mr. Derby was kind to her, and has ever since been her friend. He loves music, and it would give him great pleasure for you to go sometimes and play for him on the little organ in his parlor; but you prefer your own large one at home, and will not go. Is not this selfish, Agnes?"

"Oh, Uncle John!" she said, deprecatingly; "please don't say any more; that is enough." And her mother looked at him with an imploring look, which seemed to say: "Yes, that is quite enough."

"Well, my daughter," he said kindly, "I only want to say 'enough.' I do not want to distress you unnecessarily; I only wish to show you that even your love of music, elevating as it is in itself, may be indulged to a selfish excess, and may make you unlovely and disobliging. I am going to ask a favor of you now, will you grant it?"

"Most gladly, Uncle John; what is it?"

"I want you to promise me that, beginning to-morrow, you will never sit at the organ more than four hours a day; that you will walk every day with your mother; and that you will go to Mr. Derby's and to the Hall twice every week. Will you do this, Agnes?"

"Yes, sir. There is only one part of the promise that will be hard to keep; and if you could change places with me a little while, I think you would be willing to alter that; but if you wish me, I will promise it all."

"What is it that I would alter, Agnes?"

"That part of the promise that limits me to four hours a day. If you could only understand (as you never can) how lonely I am in my blindness, you would not ask me to promise this; you would ask me to promise all the rest, and allow me to play on the organ all the time that I am in the house. Oh, Uncle John!" she said touchingly, "nobody knows how dreary my life is if I have nothing to do. You can afford to sit with folded hands and do nothing, for all the while your eyes are busy, and you are seeing something; but I can do only two things: I can talk to my friends, and I can talk to my organ."

"Well, my daughter, I do not mean to be unreasonable, and

I will not ask you to sit at home idle. Promise then to walk an hour in the morning with me while your mother is in school; another in the afternoon with her; visit some friend every day; say your lessons, and spend the rest of the time at the organ. How will that suit you?"

"Very well, indeed, Uncle John, and I thank you for the change. If you had insisted upon the first promise, it would have been very hard; but I would have kept it rather than you should have thought me selfish. Do they think me selfish at the Hall, Uncle John?"

"I never heard them say that, Agnes; but I have heard Mr. Cameron and his daughters regret your unwillingness to visit them now. They love you very much, and it gives them pleasure to have you with them, and you ought to value their friendship, for it is not every child that has such friends as they are."

"I do value them, Uncle John, and love them dearly."

"Then, my daughter, you can show it by going to see them when they wish it."

"Will you take me with you, Uncle John, next time you go?"

"Yes, I will drive you out to-morrow morning, if your mother is willing."

The mother's consent was readily obtained, and, at the appointed time the next day, Uncle John's buggy was at the door. A short drive brought them to the Hall, where, as he had predicted, they were gladly welcomed. The girls made every effort to render Agnes contented and happy; but it was not necessary, for at the Hall she was always cheerful. She never played on the piano herself, for, to use her own expression, "the music was not deep enough, it wanted soul;" but when she was away from the organ, she liked to hear piano music, and so, after dinner, Eva led her into the parlor to play for her. As she left the room, Eva said:

"Uncle John, if you and papa want to enjoy a cigar and quiet conversation, you will find a pleasant retreat in the library, out of the reach of the opera music that Agnes and I are going to have; but if you would like to hear it, we invite you to follow us."

"I believe, Eva," he replied, "that if your father is willing, we will adjourn to the library, for I want to have a private conversation with him. Come, Julia," he said, as the three were leaving the room, "don't you go with those children. I want you to go with us; I want your judgment."

"Oh, Agnes!" exclaimed Eva, laughing, as she raised the lid of the piano, "don't you feel glad that we are excluded from that sober company? How thankful I am that nobody ever thinks

it worth while to appeal to my judgment! I know that the grave discussions of those three old people would put me to sleep in ten minutes!"

Eva's kindliness of disposition was never more manifest than when she was with Agnes, who, with her quiet temperament and necessarily quiet pursuits, was rather a companion for the thoughtful Julia than for the sprightly Eva. Confinement to the house was exceedingly irksome to Eva, and she generally lived out of doors; but whenever Agnes was at the Hall, she never thought of going out all day. Her gayety seemed sobered by sympathy whenever she was with Agnes, and her father and sister often watched with pleasure her patience and unselfishness in trying to amuse her little blind companion.

A few years can effect great changes, especially in childhood; and those that had passed away since the commencement of our story had wrought a great change in the appearance of the three little girls. Agnes was growing rapidly; but she looked pale and delicate. Her cheeks needed the bright color of vigorous health, and the effects of her sedentary life were plainly visible in her appearance. Taking her blindness into consideration, she was a well-instructed child—wonderfully so, many thought; but they did not know how much can be effected by years of patient teaching, even when the most effectual avenue for acquiring knowledge has been closed.

Julia and Eva were still as dissimilar as they had been in childhood. Their characters were only the development of the germs of infancy, and the peculiarities which had marked them then, had grown and strengthened with years. Julia was still only her father's "little woman" developed in mind and stature. The quiet, undemonstrative, reflective child, was now the quiet, undemonstrative, reflective girl, the head of her father's household, fulfilling its duties and assuming its cares and responsibilities with an energy and determination and faithfulness quite remarkable in one of her age. She had early yielded to the influence of Christian principles, and their effect was plainly visible in her character; but her minister met with a most unexpected obstacle in her outward confession of them,—one that, had he known her less thoroughly, might perhaps have discouraged him. While she both loved and respected her pastor, yet her timidity and reserve prevented that free intercourse so necessary between the minister and those whom he is to guide. He felt that he knew her well, and yet his knowledge was gained rather by watching her outer life, than by what she told him of her inner feelings. These feelings she was evidently afraid to trust. She had so often seen the lamentable effects of a religion purely

emotional, that she had fallen into the opposite but less fatal error of ignoring emotion altogether and exalting principle. Thus in her fear lest her feelings should gain the ascendancy over her principles, and betray her into a premature step, she stifled and kept them down, and would not give them the full, free current that her warm, affectionate heart pleaded for. Then, too, Julia's truthfulness and honesty kept her back. Scorning hypocrisy, and fearing a lie, she wanted to be very sure that she was a Christian before she confessed herself such; and so the very traits that form the best foundation for a Christian character made her afraid to assume it; and the minister, after waiting long and patiently, was at last tempted to be discouraged. But good seed, sown in such a soil, must needs spring up and grow. In the course of time, without persuasion and in obedience to the convictions of her own conscience, she expressed her wish to receive the rite of confirmation—a step whose solemnity she fully realized at the time, and the sanction of whose vows and obligations she never afterward disregarded. She was conscientious in her religion, and her Christian principles were not considered as something separate from, and independent of, her daily life and daily duties, but were rather regarded as specially designed to control them.

Eva was still the sunbeam of the Hall, bright, glad, and joyous. Full of health and life and animal spirits, she was the very reverse of her sister. Julia was always calm and reflective; Eva was full of enthusiasm and impulse; Julia was practical; Eva imaginative. Scarcely more than an infant when her mother died, the little Eva, in her helplessness, had seemed to appeal for sympathy more touchingly than the rest, and she had been all her life, by common consent, the pet of the household. And yet she was neither wayward nor spoiled, but was always bright and happy, and all felt that if Eva were gone, the light of the Hall would be gone too. She was still "the child," and seemed likely to continue so all her life in the estimation of those at home; nor was this alone because she was the youngest, for although now emerging from childhood, she still retained many of its traits. The interval which severed the sisters so widely in early childhood, was of course lessened now; but still Julia retained the same maternal authority and influence over Eva that she had so early possessed; and in cases where the judgment of the elder and the will of the younger conflicted, the latter was always obliged to yield. There was, however, no assumption of power on the one hand, and no rebellion on the other; it was a sort of tacit agreement, that since Eva had no mother, Julia was to occupy that relation to her. In all their other intercourse,

they were sisters, perfectly on an equality; and Eva in her childish humors and frolics often made herself merry at the expense of her grave elder sister. Julia's heart was bound up in the child, and she indulged her to any extent in what she thought right; but beyond this she was as firm and unyielding as her mother herself could have been.

Eva and Walter grew up companions as they had been in infancy. There was much in Eva's joyous temperament and animal spirits to render her a suitable companion for her brother, and as she had no sister near her own age, she had always been thrown upon him for society. The consequence was that she became fond of his sports; she dearly loved a fishing excursion with him, or a frolic with him and Carlo, or a nut-gathering in the autumn; and sometimes not the least part of her enjoyment of these excursions was to see Julia's dismay and regret, when she returned with her dress torn into shreds, or when she displayed her soft white hands hopelessly dyed with the dark walnut stain. At such times, Julia only expostulated. There was no principle involved in staining her hands or tearing her dress, and so she only reminded her that she was fast growing up to be a young lady, and that such amusements belonged to childhood; and the mischievous Eva would listen demurely, while her thoughts were planning another frolic.

Walter had now been away a long time at school, only spending the summer vacations at home; and however Julia's influence and example sobered Eva in the intervals, she surely forgot it all just as soon as Walter returned; and torn skirts, and tanned cheeks, and tangled curls were the order of the day as long as he remained at home.

With all this simplicity and freshness of character, there was mingled in Eva an element of romance, that Julia watched anxiously. Intensely practical herself, she was perhaps a little too much afraid that it might render her sister unfitted for the common duties of daily life; and while she loved to hear the child sketch her fancy pictures of the future, all glowing with the prismatic colors of her own bright imagining, yet Julia feared, perhaps unnecessarily, that if the picture were not realized, Eva's life might, by the painfulness of contrast, be rendered more somber than it would otherwise have been. Eva delighted in reading romances, and Julia gently but firmly discouraged it. She loved it herself, and indulged it to a certain extent; but she controlled herself in the enjoyment. This Eva did not do; and Julia saw with apprehension that an exciting story had become to her young sister's mind as great a pleasure, though not by any means so healthful a one, as were the fresh air and exercise to her physical frame.

She came into the library one day, where Eva was sitting in her father's arm-chair with her face buried in its cushion. She was very quiet, and at first Julia thought that she was asleep; but presently she heard a low sob. Nothing ever was done to distress Eva; nobody ever reprimanded or spoke harshly to her; and to see her in tears was so unusual a sight, that Julia was both surprised and grieved. She went up, and raised her head gently, asking what was the matter.

"Nothing, sister," she answered, as if she were half ashamed. "I could not help crying over my book."

There in her lap lay the novel,—the cause of it all. For the moment Julia felt almost indignant, to think that the child, who had no cause herself for tears, should be wasting them over imaginary woes; but she remembered that her own had sometimes overflowed in the same way, and so she only took the book quietly out of Eva's hand and closed it, saying:

"You must put it away now, Eva, and do something else. Go and take a walk, or play the piano, or, better still, go and seat yourself at once to your German lesson, and compel yourself to learn it thoroughly before you leave it, and to-morrow you can read this again."

But for once Eva would not yield. She grasped the book eagerly, and said:

"No, sister, I cannot stop now, for I am in the most interesting part of the book. It is too hot to walk, I don't want to practice, and my lesson need not be learned until to-night. Besides, Walter is coming to-morrow, and I will want to stay with him all the time; so I must finish my book to-day."

She took it from her sister, and was in a moment as deeply absorbed as ever. Julia stood and looked at her, as, forgetful of her sister's presence, Eva's eyes again filled, and her bosom heaved with sympathy for imaginary distress.

"This will not do," murmured Julia, as she left the room. "Papa must speak to Eva, and correct this, or the child will be ruined."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Walter came. The novel was finished, and Eva was ready to give herself solely to the enjoyment of her brother's society; and it seemed unnatural that the young girl, whose sensibilities had been so easily touched by a romance, should, a few days afterward, find pleasure in frolicking with her brother and Carlo, at the momentary risk of her white muslin dress.

When Walter had been at home a week, one morning, at the breakfast table, Mr. Cameron said:

"Children! what do you say to going to the White Sulphur, for a little while? We have not been there for two summers. How would you like it, Julia?"

"I should like it very much, papa," she answered. "I thought of proposing it myself, after Walter had been at home a little while; but perhaps he will not be willing to go away so soon."

"On the contrary, sister, I would like to go, if you all go with me. We need not stay more than three or four weeks, and then I will have a month to spend at home."

"And I will be delighted," said Eva, joyously. "I love that beautiful country all round the Springs; and Walter, and Carlo, and I will have plenty of fun."

"Eva," said Julia, "you must remember one thing. You are now two years older than you were when you were there before, and are quite a young lady in appearance, and you will be expected to behave as such. You cannot be the romping, tearing child that you were before."

"I declare, sister," she answered, laughing, "of all the evils in the world, you have made me dread womanhood most. If I am to sit up quiet and dignified, with my curls always smooth, and afraid to walk about lest I may soil or tear my dress, I would rather not go at all. If I cannot enjoy myself, with Walter and Carlo, just as I do at home, and be my own natural self, and be a child if I feel like it, I would greatly prefer to stay at home, where nobody seems to expect me ever to be a young lady."

Mr. Cameron and Walter laughed; and Julia said:

"I don't want to restrict you in your enjoyment, Eva; and I certainly would not have you to be anything but your own natural self. I would only remind you that you are no longer a child, but are now a young lady."

"I am just as much of a child in feeling now as I was then, and enjoy the same kind of pleasures. The glory of the Springs is the freedom from restraint that everybody ought to feel in a wild, beautiful country; and if people go there to dress up, and look handsome, and play the agreeable, I think some other places would be much more suitable. From my heart I used to pity the young ladies there, in the parlor, who were dressed so elegantly that they were afraid to move, and whose elaborately braided hair could not bear the touch of flat or sun-bonnet; and never did I so appreciate the blessed freedom of childhood as when, in my gingham dress and white apron, I roamed at large, thinking of anything in the world but how I looked. Papa, if I am to go to the Springs as a young lady, please leave me at home."

"I shall do no such thing," he answered, laughing. "You shall go in any capacity that you please, and enjoy yourself just as you please. Sister," he said, looking at Julia, "has Eva enough gingham dresses and white aprons to take to the Springs?"

"I am afraid not enough of the latter, papa, since she has not worn them since that summer; and I don't think it would be possible to find one. But she has enough dresses to go, and very nice ones, too, if we go immediately, before she and Walter and Carlo have torn them up. I saw her only yesterday playing with the dog in one of her prettiest muslin dresses, and I expected every moment to see it in tatters."

"Never mind the dresses, Eva," said Walter. "We will have a famous time at the Springs. You and I will leave the parlor and the ball-room to the belles and beaux, and we will find our pleasure in the woods."

It was rather too early in the season for the crowd of fashionable visitors; and Mr. Cameron and his family found no difficulty in securing ample accommodation, and making themselves comfortable. Reared as they had been in the country, and accustomed to its freedom and unrestraint, they reveled in the extended sphere now opened before them,—in the wild scenery, the pure mountain air, and the exhilaration of mind and body inspired by this enchanting spot. Walter and Eva were wild with delight, and Julia and her father enjoyed it scarcely less. They rambled for hours in the morning, until the sun grew too hot, and in the evening, just before sunset, they went out again, to return when the twilight had settled into dark night, or when the whole scene was flooded by glorious moonlight.

With the few visitors that they found at the Springs, Eva soon became acquainted. There was no timidity or reserve

about her. Free, unrestrained, and simple-hearted as a child, the trammels of society imposed no barrier to her intercourse. She could not long remain a stranger to people with whom she was thrown every day, and could not learn to pass, without a word or look of recognition, faces with which she was perfectly familiar. At the expiration of a week she knew everybody, and was alike at home with all; but Julia was different. Her reserve amounted to a fault; and in her intercourse with strangers she was so distant and so shy, that she denied herself the privilege of many a friendship that she might have enjoyed, and passed along unnoticed and unknown, without awakening a suspicion of the real worth and value of a character hid beneath such impenetrable reserve. Especially was this the case in the society of gentlemen. Her delicacy of feeling, and fear lest she might be thought anxious to attract admiration, made her draw closely within herself, and she never allowed them to see her real character; consequently, many who were at once attracted by her face, and eagerly sought her acquaintance, soon struck a hasty retreat, unable to decide whether her coldness resulted from a special dislike to them personally, or from a repugnance to the sex in general.

Among those already at the Springs when the Cameron family arrived, was a young physician from South Carolina. He had been there several weeks, having come for his health, and wishing to enjoy the mountain breezes, and the bracing air, and the healing waters, in peace and quiet. But the peace and quiet were become monotonous and irksome, and he was beginning to long for the society which seemed to his impatience so late in coming. It was with great pleasure therefore that he found himself one morning, at breakfast, opposite the two girls whose faces spoke them so widely different, and yet both of whom he felt sure that he would like to know. Before night he and Eva were on perfectly good terms, and she had invited him to join their morning ramble next day. He went, and tried hard to make himself agreeable to the elder sister; but he encountered this formidable barrier of reserve which seemed to him like an icy wall. Charles Beaufort professed some skill in reading faces, and before he had even spoken a word to Julia, he had concluded that hers was a character worth studying, and that it would require study fully to understand and appreciate it; but he did not expect to meet such an obstacle as he found, nor, when he encountered it, did he imagine that it would be so difficult to overcome. Even in the intercourse of that single day he thought that he could perceive that it was timidity, not formality; a shrinking from observation rather than haughty indifference; and his failure to elicit from her one word or look that betrayed interest in anything that he

said, so far from discouraging him, only sharpened, the more keenly, his desire to know thoroughly a woman so utterly unlike those who generally frequent fashionable summer resorts. And so, day after day, he sought Julia's society only to be, day after day, disappointed; disappointed not only because he seemed not to advance one step toward her favor, but because he had not yet found evidences of that character which he imagined she possessed. He was baffled and perplexed. He relied upon the face as an index of what is within; he studied hers carefully in every line and feature, and became daily more and more convinced that if there was anything in physiognomy, his first impressions must be true, and yet those first impressions were not realized. Their intercourse was not exactly formal, but he felt that however she might regard him, she at least treated him still as a stranger; their conversation was always upon general ordinary topics; he knew that he had never penetrated beneath the surface, and, despairing of ever being permitted to do so, and feeling that he was no better acquainted with her than he was the first time he ever saw her, he became discouraged, and by degrees sought Julia less and Eva more. They were now warm friends, and were much together. Charles loved the woods as much as Eva and Walter. He was something of a geologist, and Eva soon became greatly interested in collecting specimens and learning from him how the age of the world and of its different periods was written upon the rocks. He regarded her as a child and treated her accordingly, and, in her unreserve, she incidentally communicated much about her sister which Charles himself had not learned; indeed, from Eva he gained a clearer insight into what Julia really was than he could have done by months of such intercourse as he had with her. He had now a glimpse of her inner home-life, and if Eva had not been the thoughtless, unsuspecting child that she was, she would have wondered that Dr. Beaufort so often encouraged her to talk about her sister.

And now, as the season advanced, the crowd of visitors was augmented by daily accessions, and gay and brilliant daughters of fashion thronged the drawing-rooms by day and the ball-room by night. Julia mingled in the throng, and sometimes in the dance, but always with a quiet, subdued manner, that some interpreted as indifference and others as haughtiness; but perhaps she really enjoyed the scene around her more than most of them, for her placid heart was undisturbed by any feelings of rivalry, envy, or jealousy. Her acquaintance was sought by many of both sexes, for her father's name was honored and respected, but very few appreciated her as she deserved, and Eva was the universal favorite.

It was a dark rainy morning, one of those days so trying to the patience of the pleasure-lovers and pleasure-seekers who have no resources within themselves, and are proportionally miserable when cut off from external sources of amusement. The young people had tried various means to beguile the weary hours: graces on the piazza and games and cards in the drawing-room; and at last had scattered through the room singly or in groups,—here, four or five talking together; there, a pair of lovers who had forgotten the dreariness outside in the light of their own hearts; and, in another place, a person sitting alone with a book or newspaper. Julia was reading by the window, and close by were some of her companions, with Eva in their midst, eagerly discussing the book that she was reading. Not far off sat Charles Beaufort, with a newspaper, though he was acquainting himself rather with the various faces around him than with the contents of the paper. Presently he was attracted by the voices of the girls near him in earnest discussion. Eva, with her accustomed enthusiasm, was loud in her admiration of the exciting plot and interesting characters, the touching scenes and incidents of the book.

Julia was absorbed, and it was perhaps this very consciousness of the powerful spell that could be thrown over her quiet, practical nature, that made her so much dread the influence of novel-reading upon her ardent, excitable sister.

Eva pointed to her triumphantly, as she exclaimed:

"Look at sister, there! You may know how interesting it must be, for she does not approve novel-reading generally, and yet you see she is completely absorbed."

"How do you like it, Julia?" asked one of the girls.

Julia neither heard nor answered, and Eva called out:

"Sister! sister! wake up! your book seems to have carried you far into dream-land!"

Julia was aroused by the words and the laugh that followed, and Eva asked:

"Isn't it interesting, sister?"

"Very, indeed," she answered.

"And don't you like the heroine, Julia?" asked another.

"Isn't she a beautiful character?"

"No," she replied quietly. "I do not like her character at all."

"Not like her character!" echoed several voices. "What do you mean?"

"Simply," she answered, smiling, "that I do not admire her. I see that I am in the minority; but you have asked my opinion, and I must give it truly."

"What can you object to in the character?" asked one.

"I think that it is deficient in truthfulness. There are several scenes in the book, and those the most interesting too, in which plain, straightforward, open-hearted candor might have prevented much misconception and misunderstanding."

"And marred the interest of the book!" exclaimed another.

"Perhaps so," replied Julia; "but then her character would not have been marred."

"Pshaw! you are too particular, Julia! Nobody but yourself ever would have noticed such slight defects, and if they had, nobody else would have called them blemishes either in the character or in the book."

"That may be," she replied, modestly. "I don't say that I am right; I only say that this is my opinion, and that is what you asked for."

"And yet you seemed to be not only interested, but absorbed."

"So I was. It is a fascinating book, and therein consists its danger. It is well planned and well written, and in our sympathy for the sufferings of the heroine, we are tempted to forget that they are in many instances nothing but the fruit of her own doings."

"Well, I would not, for all the world, read a novel with such a practical eye. When I read romance, I give myself up entirely to it, throw my whole heart into it, and, for the time being, live and move among its characters and breathe its atmosphere. There is enough of practical reality in this everyday life of ours, and instead of carrying its maxims and axioms into the world of romance, I leave them all behind; only too glad now and then to shake off their trammels."

"That may be very well," said Julia, "when the trammels are those of fashion and custom and mere worldly sanction; but there are certain great principles which govern our daily life, and as romance after all professes to be only a picture of real life, these same great principles must or ought to be as binding there as in the world of reality. Indeed, I think that a grave responsibility rests upon romance-writers. Everybody loves fiction, and everybody reads it, and the novel-writer should see to it that he neither ignores nor disregards the great principles of truth and right."

"Well, I declare!" said one of the girls, laughing; "you are certainly the most practical novel-reader that I ever met with."

"Yes, I am practical," answered Julia, laughing in return; "everybody calls me so; and Eva, there, who is herself very high-strung, thinks that I am the most matter-of-fact person in the world."

"And papa," said Eva, impetuously, determined that if being practical was thought to be a blemish upon her sister's character, she would off-set it by a virtue, "papa and Uncle John say that sister has the most wonderfully good judgment that they ever saw in one so young. They consult her about everything."

"Hush, Eva!" said Julia, coloring; "you must not say that. Papa and Uncle John are partial judges, you know."

She resumed her book, but not to read long. Charles Beaufort had heard the conversation, and when it ceased, he came up and seated himself at her side to talk to her. The way was now opened to converse upon another than common topics, and he pursued the same theme. Though Julia was evidently embarrassed to find that her remarks had been heard by other ears than those for whom they were intended, yet she maintained her ground firmly, but modestly, and expressed her views without reserve. It was the first insight into her character that she herself had ever given him, and it only made him regret the more that she should generally shut herself up in such impenetrable reserve. Julia had been, as it were, beguiled into this conversation, but it proved the entering wedge to another kind of intercourse with Dr. Beaufort than she had ever permitted before. She had now expressed herself freely to him once, and he had understood her, and ever afterward she felt under less restraint with him, and treated him less as a stranger and more as a friend. Every day developed something in her character to admire the more, and while he could not but prefer to occupy his present position rather than the one he held at first, yet this did not by any means satisfy him. Julia now talked freely with him, walked with him, and did not disguise the pleasure that she had in his society; but once or twice when he rather transcended the limits of friendship, and showed by a look or some delicate act that he would like to be regarded in another light, the timidity and shyness all came back in a moment and threatened to break off their intercourse altogether. He did not know what to think of it; sometimes he imagined that her affections belonged to another, and that her truthfulness and delicacy had thus combined to arrest his advances; and at another time he thought that an incidental word betrayed otherwise. He was perplexed to understand her feelings toward him, but he liked her society; indeed, day by day, it was becoming more necessary to him, and so he determined blindly to enjoy it while he could, and if, in the end, he should be obliged to relinquish it, to bear it philosophically, and try and forget her.

And so the time passed on. They were a great deal together,

and had Julia mingled more with the girls of her age, and had her reserve not made them afraid to take the liberty, they would have jested with her, and teased her about her South Carolina friend; but as it was, fortunately for Charles's comfort, she did not know that their intercourse had ever been remarked, and so without interruption they enjoyed it.

It was Sunday evening; the last Sunday that they were to spend at the Springs,—one of those calm, quiet evenings that we sometimes see, when the very air seems weighed down with solemn stillness. The frivolous conversation, the meaningless laugh, the blaze of fashion to which not even the holy day afforded a respite, were in striking and painful contrast to the peace and serenity around; and Eva, coming up to her sister, as they stood beside the spring in the midst of a merry crowd, whispered:

“Let us go and take a walk: it is such a beautiful evening.”

They found Walter, and the three went away over a neighboring hill to a quiet little dell on the other side, through which flowed and sparkled a little brook. They were not unfamiliar with the spot, for their rambles often ended there; and Julia and Charles had spent some pleasant hours together there, strolling along the banks of the stream or sitting under the trees. Walter and Eva pursued their walk, and Julia seated herself under a broad oak. She was glad to be alone in a quiet spot, for new and strange thoughts and feelings had just been awakened in her heart, and she wanted to understand them. It was only that morning that they had determined to return home in a day or two, and Julia was startled to find that the thought of leaving Charles Beaufort had been all day uppermost in her mind. She felt ashamed and distressed. Quite unconscious that her own timidity and shyness had prevented the acknowledgment of feelings of whose very existence she was ignorant, she only knew that he had never spoken one word to her that he might not have said to any other young lady there, and she was dismayed to find that her feelings had, unasked, become interested. Her cheeks burned at the thought, and she asked herself what she was to do. There was but one course, and that was to root out the feelings with no sparing hand, and Julia determined to do it. She felt sure that she could, for obstacles generally gave way before her unyielding determination.

Presently a step was heard, and, looking up, she saw with pain and surprise the object of her thoughts approaching her. At that moment she would rather have seen anybody else in the world. Her heart beat rapidly and the color mounted to her temples, but the more she tried to be quiet and composed, the more agitated she became; and when he reached her, he saw at

once that she was, from some cause, painfully excited. He did not feel at liberty to notice it; indeed, he began to be embarrassed himself, because he felt that he had intruded upon her privacy, and he tried to reassure himself and to compose her by plunging at once into conversation. Julia tried hard, for her own sake, to respond to his effort; but she could not, and she felt that her attempt was a miserable failure.

Charles himself was exceedingly disappointed. He had unexpectedly found her in his evening stroll; and when he saw her there alone, the pleasing hope was at once awakened that he might now meet with the encouragement, and find the opportunity for which he had patiently waited; but instead of this, he had never seen her so reserved before. She either could not or would not talk; and he was as much relieved as she was, when Walter and Eva rejoined them. In their walk back they all went together, and Charles and Eva principally sustained the conversation, thus giving Julia time to collect her thoughts and summon her accustomed self-control. Before the walk was ended, she so far succeeded that Charles wondered as much at her speedy recovery from her embarrassment as he had wondered at the embarrassment itself. They passed the spring on their way, and, as they approached it, Eva and Walter hastened on, leaving their companions in the rear.

Suddenly Charles stopped, and pointing to a little cluster of wild flowers at his feet, said:

"Miss Cameron, will you oblige me by giving me a remembrancer (not of this evening, for I would rather forget this), but of our other pleasant intercourse at the White Sulphur?"

She blushed at the allusion to their present painful interview, and as she stooped to pluck the flowers, she only answered:

"Certainly, with pleasure."

She tied their little blossoms together with a blade of grass; and as he received them, he offered some in return, saying:

"I hope you will not refuse to accept, as well as to give a memorial."

She clasped the flowers upon her bosom with her breast-pin, and wore them during the evening; but although he tried several times to win her back to her accustomed unreserved conversation with him, he could not succeed. Some new barrier, he could not imagine what, had suddenly sprung up between them.

Two days afterward they left the Springs. At their departure, while Charles was exchanging adieus, Mr. Cameron, seconded by Eva, cordially invited him to the Hall. He looked at Julia, but could not tell from her face whether his visit would be acceptable or not, so he only responded to the invitation in general terms of thanks and courtesy.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW evenings after they arrived at home, Uncle John drove Agnes out to the Hall. Eva had much to tell of her enjoyment at the Springs, and Agnes was interested, and Uncle John amused at her descriptions of persons and things.

"Sister was very much afraid," she said, "that I would be regarded as nothing but an overgrown child; but I believe in the end she was quite satisfied with my lady-like deportment."

"Yes," said Julia, "Eva behaved very creditably. She kept Carlo at a respectful distance, only tore her dress once, and I never saw her in the parlor with tangled curls. Indeed, she acted the young lady very well, nor did she find the character so irksome and disagreeable as she imagined. Did you, Eva?"

"No!" she answered, laughing; "I like my method of being a young lady very much indeed; but I should object as much as ever to the prim, overdressed young ladyhood that I saw in the parlor. I mingled the enjoyments of childhood with mine. I roamed about at pleasure all day, and in the evening smoothed my curls and changed my dress, and was ready for the dance; but if I had been obliged to spend hours every afternoon arranging a ball-dress or in the hands of the hair-dresser, I should indeed have been disgusted with being a young lady."

"If you could have seen her, Uncle John," said Walter, "in the ball-room, you could not have believed that she was the same girl, who, only three or four weeks ago, wanted to be always a child, and dreaded the necessity of ever becoming a young lady. She danced and entertained the gentlemen, and played the belle generally, not only with as much ease, but apparently with as much enjoyment as anybody there. Indeed, I rather thought that she enjoyed it more than anybody else."

"I don't deny it," she answered. "I enjoyed myself very much in every way. I enjoyed the rambles, the dance, the games, and the bowling-alley, when I had an agreeable partner. The only time that I ever really sighed for a good romp with Walter and Carlo, was that miserable rainy morning, when we were all pent up in the parlor,—some half asleep, some yawning, some complaining of the weather, and others wondering if it was going to be a rainy spell, some reading, and others again discussing the merits of a novel. I'll warrant that sister remembers that morn-

ing; I know I do, for it was the occasion of the loss of my knight; he forsook me, and ever afterward devoted himself to her."

"How was that, Eva?" asked Uncle John.

"Well, sir, when we arrived at the Springs, we found this gentleman already there, and there were so few persons that we naturally became soon acquainted. I found him very gentlemanly and agreeable, and I had every reason to believe that he liked me too, for he certainly was a great deal with me. We took long walks together, he and Walter and I, and he taught me something about geology, and we became great friends. I thought that he evidently liked me a great deal better than he did my sober, dignified sister. But this unfortunate morning, he accidentally overheard a conversation between some young ladies, sister, and myself, upon the merits of a novel that she was then reading. I scarcely remember what sister said; I only know that it was some of that plain, practical sense that you and papa are always extolling, and that my knight seemed to approve it likewise. As soon as we had finished our discussion, he came up, and, seating himself by sister's side, began to talk to her. I did not hear what they talked about; but I watched his face, and the painful truth flashed upon me that my knight was gone, hopelessly, irrevocably gone! And so it proved; I did not learn any more geology; he was engaged with another pupil, teaching her either that or something else."

"Why, how is this, daughter?" said Uncle John, laughing, and looking at Julia; "I did not think you would have been at home a whole week without mentioning a word of all this to me, and, worse still, that you would have left me to hear it from another!"

Julia blushed, and only answered:

"If I had had anything to tell, Uncle John, you should certainly have heard it before now."

Eva was in her element when she was teasing her sister; and unconscious that this subject was really painful to her, she continued:

"Just think! Isn't it strange, Uncle John, that I, the sentimental romantic sister, the one most fitted, it would seem, for the heroine of a love affair, should have been not only overlooked (that might have been tolerated), but absolutely forsaken for my matter-of-fact sister, who is so practical that she even measures a novel by the square and compass of practical principles! Isn't it unbearable?" she added, laughing.

"If it is," he replied, "you endure it with wonderful cheerfulness. I am glad to see that your faithless knight has not broken your heart."

"No, indeed, not yet! It is made of 'sterner stuff' than that. But won't it be grand now to have a little romance here among ourselves! with plain old Cameron Hall for our castle, a South Carolina knight, our practical sister for his lady-love, papa for the old baron, and Eva for——But where," said she, looking round, "has the heroine flown? I know that there are no trap-doors or invisible closets in this castle; how did she get out?"

"She got out on her feet," said Uncle John, laughing, "as a sensible woman would naturally do when a silly sister is teasing her to death."

"Well, Uncle John, 'turn about is fair play.' She frequently amuses herself, and her friends too, as you yourself are witness, with my romantic notions; it is but fair that I should sometimes enjoy a laugh at her expense."

"You have certainly done it now," he replied, "and have driven her out of the room besides."

"Uncle John," she said, with a mischievous laugh, "I was only jesting when I began; but, indeed, from the looks of sister's cheeks, I think that there must be more in this thing than I suspected. Just think how quiet she has been about it! I was with her day and night for four weeks at the Springs, and she never intimated to me, by word or look, that she cared any more for him than she did for any other gentleman there. Now I never could have done that."

"Nobody doubts it, Eva," he replied. "Everybody at the Springs would have known it at once, if your heart had been interested. Indeed, I would not be surprised if some would have found it out before you yourself did."

"Oh no, Uncle John! I would not like everybody to know such a thing; but I would be certain to tell sister and all my friends; indeed, I could not help it."

"No, child, you could not; you would betray it just as certainly, and just as naturally as you breathe the air. But you have not yet told me the name of your knight."

"Dr. Charles Beaufort, of South Carolina."

"Beaufort, of South Carolina!" he exclaimed. "Then he must be a son of William Beaufort, my old college friend. How time flies!" he added, thoughtfully, "and what an old man I am getting to be! Think of William Beaufort's son, a young man older than his father was when I knew him!"

"Have you never seen him, Uncle John, since he was so young?"

"Only once, Eva, since we parted at college; and that was not very long afterward. He was a noble fellow, and I have all my life looked forward to meeting him again as one of my greatest

pleasures ; and especially the last few years, since I have felt myself growing old. I have determined every year to visit him before its close. William Beaufort's son ! Truly, Eva, when you began to tell me about your knight, I little thought that I would be so much interested in him."

"Not my knight, Uncle John ; he is sister's now. I have surrendered all claim to him."

"I wish that you or your sister, or whoever claims him and controls him, had brought him home with you. I would like nothing better than to see and know him myself."

"He treated me very cruelly," she answered, laughing ; "yet I must acknowledge that I think you would find him worth knowing. I wish he would come too, and I was even magnanimous enough to invite him to the Hall ; but his lady-love was not so hospitable, and he did not promise to come."

"Is he still at the Springs, Eva ? If so, I will write myself and ask him."

"We left him there ; and I believe he intends remaining until the close of the season."

"Then I will write to him to-morrow."

Julia now returned as quiet and serene as ever. Eva's eyes were full of mischief, and she was ready for another attack ; but a glance from her father arrested the words that already trembled on her lips ; and she saw that it was decreed that Julia should spend the rest of the evening in peace.

When Uncle John and Agnes were returning home, he said, more to himself than to her :

"I shall be very sorry to give up Julia ; but it must be so in the course of events. She is destined to make some man happy, very happy !"

"Uncle John," said Agnes, "you say that you are an old man ; do you look old ?"

"Yes, daughter, I look old ; and ever since my youth, I have seemed older than I really was. Why do you ask ?"

"Does Miss Julia think that you look old ?"

"Yes, she is obliged to think so, when she looks at my wrinkled face and white head."

"Does she think that you are very old, entirely too old to have a young wife ?" persisted Agnes.

"Why, child, what are you talking about ? I don't understand you."

"I want to know, Uncle John, if she will say yes, when you ask her to marry you."

"Why, what on earth do you mean, Agnes ?" replied he, both amazed and amused. "Who could have put such a notion into

your head? I am sure that it has never entered either hers or my own."

"Nobody put it into my head, Uncle John. I have—I was going to say—*seen* it; but that I could not do; but I have *felt* that you loved Miss Julia better than anybody in the world; and so I thought of course you must want to marry her."

"No, child, no! Uncle John is an old bachelor, quite old enough to be Julia's father. He loves her very much, it is true; but not as you imagine. Besides, Agnes, did you not hear Eva say that a young gentleman at the Springs liked Julia very much?"

"Yes, sir; but Eva does not know that Miss Julia likes him; and I do know that she loves you very much."

"Yes, such love as she has for her father. Agnes, I never expect to marry anybody."

"Oh, Uncle John, I am so glad to hear you say that!" she said, with a look and a tone of infinite relief. "I do not want anybody in this world to take your heart away from me."

"My poor, little, jealous child!" said Uncle John, putting his arm around her, and drawing her up close to him; "nobody shall ever do that. I have promised to devote the rest of my life to the comfort and happiness of my little blind child; and I intend to do it."

"Will you promise me never to marry anybody?"

"There is no need to promise, Agnes. It is not at all probable that I will ever want to marry anybody; and even if I should, nobody will want to marry me."

"But will you promise? Will you promise never to marry anybody, at least as long as I live?"

"I might as well make the promise unconditionally, my child; for you will probably outlive me many years."

"Perhaps so," she said, "and perhaps not. It may not be right to ask you never to marry at all; but will you promise never while I live?"

"Is it right, my daughter, to wish to bind me by such a promise? Suppose that Uncle John should find somebody in the world whom his old heart could love very much,—somebody who would cheer his solitary, lonely life,—would you be willing to condemn him to loneliness and solitude, for fear that he might love somebody else better than you? This would be selfish, my daughter, and you are not generally so."

Agnes did not reply; but Uncle John read plainly in her face that she still wanted the promise. His heart went out toward the little helpless child, who seemed to cling to him for protection and love, and for an instant he was tempted to gratify her;

but afterward he thought that it was better not; it would be encouraging her to be selfish and exacting.

"I tell you what I will promise, Agnes," he said. "I will promise never to marry anybody unless you are willing; and I will pledge myself to love and take care of you, and be a father to you so long as I live. Will that do?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, "I will be satisfied with that. Thank you, Uncle John, I am very happy now; so happy, that I can almost see!"

About a week afterward, Uncle John went out to the Hall with a letter.

"See here, Eva!" he said. "Here is your knight's answer to my invitation."

"Is he coming?" she asked.

"Yes, he is coming; but take it and read it for yourself."

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed, as she folded it again, "it is very well to talk about the pleasure of renewing the acquaintance of 'the Cameron sisters;' I know well enough what that means. Uncle John," she asked archly, "what is the reason that people always feel obliged to throw a little thin veil of duplicity over their love-matters? Why is it, that those who would scorn evasion in anything else, think it not only justifiable, but almost indispensable in affairs of the heart? Now I would have liked it much better, if Dr. Beaufort had said candidly, 'Miss Julia Cameron,' instead of 'the Cameron sisters;' and he might as well have done it, for we all know exactly what he meant."

"Come, come, Eva," replied Uncle John, laughing, "you have no right to interpret his feelings otherwise than by his own words. He says that he wants to see you both, and you ought to believe him. You told me yourself that he was very fond of your society, and was a great deal with you."

"Yes, that is true; but it was only before he was well acquainted with sister. You know, Uncle John, everybody is acquainted with me in five minutes after the introduction; but it takes a long time to know sister, and I only enjoyed the privilege of the doctor's society while he was gradually making his way to her confidence. Uncle John, as sure you live, they were a sly couple!"

"Oh, Eva!" exclaimed Julia, "what an accusation!"

"It is true, sister, for the event proved it. While I felt secure in my possession, and thought that I had him fairly ensnared, I suddenly found not only that my only claim to his favor was the fact of being your sister, but what was more astounding still, that you yourself did not regard him with indifference."

Julia blushed deeply and painfully. She had earnestly hoped

that nobody suspected the existence of feelings which she herself had so unexpectedly found in her heart, and which she was so honestly and earnestly striving to eradicate. She was accustomed to her sister's raillery; but she was at a loss now to tell how much she meant for jest, and how much for earnest. She looked ready to burst into tears, as she said earnestly:

"Uncle John, you will believe me when I tell you that Dr. Beaufort and I are only friends, and have never exchanged a single word which either of us might not have spoken to the most indifferent person at the Springs."

Uncle John saw that the subject was painful to her, and he tried to stop Eva, but he did not succeed until she had said:

"Well, that may be true now, but it will not be so long, if appearances are to be relied upon. Dr. Beaufort is coming next week, and his actions will speak for themselves, and Uncle John will decide which is right, you or I."

During the intervening time before Charles was expected, he was much talked of by Eva and Uncle John. Julia never spoke of him, though she thought much more about him than she was willing to do. She was striving hard to overcome feelings that were strong and powerful, when she first discovered their existence, and she was surprised to find that they so stubbornly resisted her efforts to subdue them. She deemed it, however, possible to eradicate them. She knew that it was right, and she was resolved to do it. She regretted the necessity of meeting him again so soon, and if she could have been consulted, she would much rather that his visit to Uncle John might have been deferred until she felt sure that she could meet him with indifference of heart as well as of manner.

Uncle John had promised Eva to bring him out to the Hall the very day of his arrival in Hopedale. Julia knew when he was expected, and she spent a restless and uncomfortable day, trying to school herself to meet him with proper calmness and indifference; but her heart bounded and her cheeks flushed when, in the afternoon, she saw Uncle John's buggy drive through the lower gate. She watched it as it approached, and saw, with mingled regret and satisfaction, that there was no stranger in it; Uncle John was alone.

She asked no question; but she did not have to wait long for the explanation, which Eva hastily elicited.

Instead of the gentleman himself, there had come a letter regretting his inability to fulfill his promise. He had been suddenly summoned home to make immediate preparations to sail for Europe; his father wished him to complete his course of medical study in Paris.

"And so ends our little romance!" exclaimed Eva, discontentedly. "I had fixed my heart upon seeing its denouement."

"You need not give up yet, Eva," said Uncle John. "You may still have that pleasure at some future day. He says that he hopes yet to pay me the promised visit."

"How long does our hero expect to be gone?"

"Probably two years."

"Two years, Uncle John! Then, indeed, I might as well give up!"

"Why, Eva," said Uncle John, laughing, "you are the very last person from whose lips I should expect to hear such sentiments. A romantic young lady like yourself is expected to think that love is undying, unchanging, eternal, etc. etc.!"

"I may be romantic, Uncle John, but I am not therefore necessarily unreasonable, and I don't think it probable that feelings, whose root is only the growth of two or three weeks, will survive the separation of two years; but whether they will or not, I am very sorry that Dr. Beaufort did not come."

"And so am I. I anticipated great pleasure from seeing William Beaufort's son."

"And I," thought Julia, "will see to it, that in two years every remembrance of him is rooted out of my heart. If we ever meet again, it must be, as we met at first, as strangers: I have found out that he and I cannot be friends!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLES BEAUFORT had been gone a year, and in that interval he had written two or three times to Uncle John, and through him had sent kind remembrances to Mr. Cameron and his daughters, just such messages as he might have sent to any other indifferent acquaintances. Julia believed that she had finally conquered all her interest in him, and that she had learned to regard him as she did the many others whom she met at the same time and whom she now scarcely ever thought of. There was no change in the quiet family circle at Cameron Hall; but in the political world the cloud, which years ago statesmen had seen and feared, though then "no bigger than a man's hand," now loomed up dark and black above the horizon, and threatened

to cover the nation with a pall of darkness. The country was shaken to its very center, and the eyes of the nation were strained anxiously as if to pierce the veil of the future. The Presidential election was close at hand; in its uncertain balance trembled the fate of the nation; and the ballot-box was to decide whether its government was to be placed in the hands of a conservative Executive, who would respect the rights and liberties of all, or in the hands of a sectional partisan, who would deny to a portion of the country the rights secured to it by the Constitution. Great was the diversity of opinion with regard to the final result. Southern politicians urged dismemberment, and declared that it could be accomplished without bloodshed; and Northern fanaticism urged the election of a sectional President on the ground that the South was too weak and cowardly to attempt resistance; but the thoughtful and far-seeing of both sections looked on with trembling anxiety and apprehension, and their hearts were failing them for fear of the terrible vortex of civil war into which they believed that the nation was about to plunge. Meanwhile, the fourth of November sealed the nation's fate.

A few weeks passed by, and South Carolina was the first to speak, through the voice of her people in convention assembled, her determination to sever the bonds that bound her in the Federal Union. Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi followed, and Secession was an accomplished fact: whether or not it would be followed by bloodshed, was yet to be proved.

It was a gloomy afternoon in January, with a fitful, howling wind, driving along thick masses of cloud, which seemed hesitating whether to fall in rain or snow. The warmth and genial glow of the library at Cameron Hall, with its blazing fire, its comfortable arm-chairs, and its well-stored book-cases, formed a pleasing contrast to the dreariness without; and yet in the circle gathered around the fire, there were grave faces and anxious looks, which were more in consonance with the gloominess without than with the cheerfulness within.

There had been a long pause, which was at last broken by Uncle John, who said, rather as if in reply to something that had been said before, than as if projecting a new theme of conversation:

"Yes, everything seems quiet now, but I am afraid that it is a treacherous stillness, from which we will be startled before long by the firing of the gun."

"Uncle John," said Eva, "what do you mean by the firing of the gun?"

"I mean, my daughter," he replied, gravely, "the ushering in of war, civil war, the most terrible calamity that can overtake a

nation. I think it may come soon, even sooner than any of us expect; and I should not be surprised at any moment to hear of a declaration of war."

"I sympathize with your fears of the final result," said Mr. Cameron; "but I have no idea that the catastrophe is so near at hand. I believe that the statesmen on both sides will be slow to engage in a war which involves an element that will make it the most terrible and destructive civil war ever waged. I mean the element of servile insurrection."

"This consideration might possibly affect the South if she were the aggressor, but for the very reason that this element would operate so disastrously against her, the North will be less reluctant to enter upon the contest. As far as the South is concerned, we have no longer any voice in the matter. Some of the Southern States have already seceded, others are evidently about to follow; it only remains for the Federal Government to say if they shall go in peace. The decision is easily foreseen."

"But," said Mr. Cameron, "Commissioners from the South are going to Washington to see what can be done. Perhaps now, after all, matters may be adjusted to the satisfaction of both sections."

"I wish it might be so, sir; but indeed I cannot see what there is to adjust. The question now is narrowed down to a single point: shall the seceded States go in peace, or shall the effort be made to whip them back into the Union?—a Union which has been for years more in name than in heart and reality. No, Mr. Cameron. Time was, when this question might have been settled peaceably, but I am afraid that that time is passed now. You yourself have seen how restless the South has long been growing under Northern aggression, and, considering her reputation for hot blood, I think she has borne with wonderful forbearance the narrowing and paring down of her rights. This, though done stealthily, and through the course of years, she has watched with a jealous eye, and has been more than once roused to an indignant protest against her wrongs, and to threats that she would sever her bonds with the Federal Union; but her wrath has been appeased from time to time, and the danger averted by compromises. These she has found, by experience, were all hollow, and meant nothing more, on the part of the North, than a patient waiting for a more convenient season, when she would be less on the alert or more tamely submissive. At last the mask has been thrown off, and the North stands revealed, by the Presidential election, in direct and avowed antagonism to Southern rights and institutions. Now, brought face to

face with the issue, the South is compelled to speak distinctly, decidedly. She has done so, and has declared her determination herself to try to guard, by a constitution and government of her own, the rights which the Constitution and Government of the United States, in the hands of fanaticism, have proved insufficient to protect. And she is right. Up to a certain point forbearance is a virtue, and that point the South has already reached. Tame submission to oppression and wrong is cowardice; it is what she has never done and never will do."

"Nor would I have her do it," said Mr. Cameron. "I would not have her concede a single right guaranteed her by the Constitution; and yet I have always thought that this vexed question was susceptible of a peaceable solution, and I believe even now, when things have gone so far, it might yet be done."

"Perhaps so in any other hands than those of Northern fanaticism. You and I could settle it in five minutes, upon the principle of the old Virginia planter, whose rule it was to attend to his own business, and leave his neighbors to attend to theirs. If the North would agree to take care of its own institutions, and leave us to take care of ours, there would be at once an end of strife; but such is not the character of Northern fanaticism, whose stealthy but sure encroachments old men like ourselves have watched for years. Now it dares openly and defiantly to lay its hand upon the Constitution, and either to wrest its meaning, or, bolder still, to declare that it is defective, because it does not square with that 'higher law' which it professes to have found. No, sir! with this to contend against, there is no such thing as a peaceable solution of this problem. Nothing but the sword will ever cut this knot, and we shall soon see the same busy and malignant spirit, that found employment in colonial days in burning witches, equally busy in inciting, in the Southern States, that servile insurrection which will be the main lever used in bringing them into subjection."

"The breaking up of this Union is a great calamity," said Mr. Cameron, shaking his head thoughtfully.

"So it is, sir; but I believe it to be the lesser of the two evils now submitted to the nation. Between oppression and dismemberment there can be but one choice."

"Old Virginia has not spoken yet, Uncle John. I must wait and hear what she says. Never rash, always conservative, always weighing consequences before she takes a step, I know that I can rely upon her judgment, and am willing to pledge myself beforehand to indorse her decision."

"I cannot go quite so far, Mr. Cameron. I love and respect my old mother State perhaps as much as you do, and believe

that I shall find her now, as I have ever found her before, in the right. I do not believe that, under existing circumstances, she will stay in the Union; but if she should, her action cannot alter my sense of right. For once, I shall think that the Old Dominion was lamentably wrong in her judgment. She has been slower to speak than some of her sisters; but when she does, be assured that it will be in as bold and determined a voice as theirs."

"It becomes her to be slow in taking such a step, Uncle John. She is a frontier State; her territory will be the battle-ground; her heritage will be the first to be laid waste. Indeed, indeed, sir, it behooves her to weigh well her decision."

"So it does, Mr. Cameron. She ought to think calmly and deeply; not, however, so much of the consequences, as of the right. If it be right for her to separate herself from the Federal Union at all, she ought to do so under any and all penalties. If it were merely a question of expediency, it would not only be proper, but it would be her duty to count the cost; but in a question of moral right and wrong, she has nothing to do with consequences."

"Uncle John," interrupted Eva, "you and papa have talked about the war with such gloomy faces and sad tones, that you have almost made me dread it more than anything in the world. But it has its bright side too, especially for us young people. Think of the splendid officers and gay uniforms, the glittering swords and waving plumes, the prancing horses and bands of music! And in a civil war, think how many real romances there will be; brothers unexpectedly finding themselves opposed to each other in battle; fathers finding their sons among the prisoners that they themselves have taken; and girls dying of broken hearts because they discover their lovers among the ranks of the enemy!"

"My poor child!" said Mr. Cameron, compassionately. "God grant that you may never know more of the horrors of war than you have learned from reading your innocent romances. The plumes, the swords, and the uniforms may all be very beautiful and attractive; but under their glittering exterior are concealed desolation and ruin and bloodshed, outrage, oppression, and murder, insult and brutality! Ah! my daughter, all the gay bands of music upon earth, blending into one loud and magnificent orchestra, could not drown the wail of a whole nation's widowed and orphaned hearts! Of all evils upon the face of the earth, may God, in his wisdom and justice, visit us with any other, if he will only save us from a civil war!"

"Amen!" said Uncle John, solemnly.

There was a pause, and presently Mr. Cameron said, as if thinking aloud :

"At what a fearful cost must the South purchase her independence—if, indeed, she should ever be able to purchase it at all !"

"Fearful cost, indeed," repeated Uncle John, "not only of treasure, but of blood; and that, too, the best blood of the land. It will be in this respect, as well as in others, a most unequal contest. Their ranks will be principally filled with the refuse population of European cities; ours will be made up of the best men of the country, the flower of Southern youth, the glory of Southern manhood. Yes, the price of Southern independence will be costly; but I believe that it will be paid without a murmur."

"You speak, Uncle John, as if the result were beyond a peradventure. Are you quite sure that the South will be able to maintain such an unequal contest? Does it not well become the people to weigh the probabilities of success before they undertake it? A civil war cannot leave us as it found us. If we succeed in gaining our independence, well and good; but if not, our position in the Federal Union will not be what it is now. If we embark in this war, we stake our all upon the issue, and must be content to accept either independence or subjugation."

"I know it, sir. I believe that I have a just estimate, not only of the cost of this war, but also of its risks, its uncertainties, and the doubtfulness of the final issue. I am not confident, I am only hopeful. I do not, like some of our politicians, shut my eyes to the odds against us, and want our people to rush blindfolded into it; but I would have them like men, like *freemen*, look the thing calmly and steadily in the face, and choose between two evils now offered them. The choice they are obliged to make. The overgrown power of one section of this Union now offers to the other abject submission on the one hand, and, on the other, resistance even unto blood. I, for one, can choose between them; and I believe that the majority of Southern men will feel as I do. It may, as you say, become the nation to weigh well the probabilities of success; but, in my humble judgment, it becomes it equally well to maintain its rights, and resist their infringement. Were the result even more doubtful than I think it to be, I would be willing to make the experiment, because I do not believe any other course to be consistent with manly or national honor."

"But if we should fail!——"

"Yes, Mr. Cameron, that is indeed a tremendous ~~if~~, fraught with consequences which you and I cannot now conceive. But, sir, our case is desperate. We are somewhat in the condition

of the Syrian lepers; and, like theirs, our efforts to extricate ourselves must be desperate. We must do our best, and if we fail, *we can but fail.*"

"But, Uncle John, you just now admitted that failure would only make our condition worse than it is."

"So I did; but, sir, I believe it to be more right and manly to fail in the defense of our rights, than quietly and tamely to surrender them. Submission involves disgrace; failure does not. I would rather belong to the South overpowered, defeated, crushed, and panting with a hard but fruitless struggle, than to the South abjectly, servilely submissive."

There was a few moments' silence, and Mr. Cameron said, musingly:

"I wish that there never had been a negro upon this continent. They have been from the very beginning a source of endless discord and jarring."

"Do you think, Mr. Cameron, that the negro is the cause of this threatened war? I tell you, no. Neither North nor South would rend this government for all the negroes upon the face of the earth. Northern aggression has seized upon this institution as a pretext for curtailing Southern rights; and Southern men will spring to arms and gird on their swords, not in defense of negro slavery, but in defense of those many rights, of which slavery is one, guaranteed them by the Constitution which their fathers helped to frame and seal by their own blood. If there were no such thing as slavery, the North would find some other right to cut short; and Southern men would be as prompt to defend it. This will be no war, on the part of the South, in defense of negro slavery; as well say that the Revolution was a war for the tea overturned in Boston harbor."

Mr. Cameron made no reply; and presently Eva interrupted the silence by exclaiming:

"Uncle John, I am so glad that you and papa are too old to go in the army, and Walter is too young. I won't have anybody to be uneasy about."

"Walter is not too young, my daughter, for the country will have need of all her sons; and if I am not mistaken in the boy, he would not be willing to let other young men fight his battles. Your father and I are too old to fight, but there is no man in the South so old that he cannot do something, if not personally, at least with his means, and whatever a man of my age and my means can do, I hope to be found willing to do."

"I suspect, Uncle John, that if we really have a war, I shall be sorry for the first time in my life that I am a woman. If I belonged to the brave sex, I should be among the first to volunteer."

"I don't doubt it, my enthusiastic child. But, Eva, your sex need not prevent your usefulness; for the country will need the help of her daughters as well as of her sons."

"What can weak, timid women do? I should think that they would be a great clog upon the energies of the men who go out to fight."

"So they may be, my daughter, but not necessarily. There will be much in the way of active work that women can do. In sewing and knitting for the soldiers, and in nursing the sick and wounded, they may find, if they desire it, ample employment; and, as in case of war, the blockaded ports will throw the people almost entirely upon their own resources, the army will have to look to the women of the South for a large part of the material for their clothing. But if none of all this should be required of them, still there is something for them to do. War brings many evils in its train besides sickness, wounds, and death. There are many privations which will bear hard upon the Southern women, reared as they generally have been in ease and luxury. Many articles of food now looked upon as necessities of life will have to be given up; many articles of dress now necessary to a lady's toilet will have to be surrendered; but more than this, husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and lovers will leave behind them saddened homes and aching hearts, and the true Southern woman who would serve her country must bear up bravely and cheerfully under these privations and separations. Her complaints and repinings must not weaken the energies and clog the hands of those who need the whole of their unfettered manhood to do their duty. When her heart is heavy, and her eyes blinded with tears, she must buckle on the armor of those she loves best on earth, and bid them go serve their country, without fear or anxiety for those they leave behind. A woman who will do this is worthy of her name, and serves her country as truly as the man who encounters the more palpable hardships and dangers of the camp and the battle-field. From her sons the country demands active duty; from her daughters, patient and cheerful endurance."

"Uncle John," said Julia, who had laid down her sewing, and had listened attentively to every word, "I know now what I ought to do in case of war, and I thank you for it. It is a great help to have our duty clearly marked out, so that there need be no delay, no hesitation in action."

"There will be none in yours, my daughter," he answered. "I wish I was as certain of every woman in the South being found at her post and doing her duty as I am of you. But, see here, girls," he added, "the whole afternoon is gone, and it is time this moment to go home, and I have not mentioned one

word of the business that brought me out. I did not come this afternoon to discuss politics, or to deliver a war-lecture; my business is solely of a personal nature."

"Well, Uncle John," said Eva, "there is time enough yet for your personal concerns, and the time that you occupied in your war-lecture, as you call it, was not lost. Your business can be settled after tea."

"But I did not intend to stay to tea, Eva. Old men, like myself, ought to be at home in the chimney-corner such a night as this, instead of driving about the country. However, there is no help for it now; I must stay, for I cannot go home until I have accomplished what I came for."

When they went back into the library, after tea, Julia drew down the curtains, arranged the fire, and brought the cigar-case to her father and Uncle John. Uncle John threw himself back in the luxurious arm-chair, and with the blue wreath curling slowly above his head, seemed, for several minutes, lost in thought. Presently he said, abruptly:

"I have been thinking a great deal lately, Mr. Cameron, about Agnes's blindness. I wonder if it is really beyond the reach of surgical skill."

"That, Uncle John, could only be learned from the surgeon himself, and it is well worth while to get an opinion on the subject. If she were my child, and he gave me the smallest possible hope of success, I should not hesitate to subject her to the operation."

"Nor would I, if she were mine; but that is the difficulty. The responsibility is one that I dare not assume for another person's child."

"What does her mother say about it?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"I have never spoken to her on the subject; for I thought it useless to excite her with the thought until I had some definite plan in my mind. It is a project on which I have expended much thought to very little purpose, and so I determined to come out and talk to you and Julia on the subject, thinking that perhaps we three might decide upon some feasible plan. The first difficulty in the way is to get her to the surgeon. The only one that I know, to whom I am willing to intrust her, lives in Paris."

"In Paris!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, with two or three significant puffs of his cigar; "why, Uncle John, you must be crazy!"

"Do you think it would be such a Quixotic expedition, Mr. Cameron?"

"I do not think it Quixotic, sir; I think it simply impossible. The first difficulty in your way will not be, as you imagine, to

get Agnes to the surgeon; it will rather be to gain her mother's consent that you should take her to him "

"I have not been unmindful, sir, of that difficulty too "

"Never mind difficulties, Uncle John," said Julia, cheerfully. "If you are right in what you propose to do, the difficulties will either gradually disappear, or else be more easily overcome than you now imagine. If you think that there is the least hope of Agnes's recovering her sight, and are willing to bear the expense, you can take her to Paris; and if I were in your place I would not hesitate to do it."

"Why, my daughter," exclaimed Mr. Cameron, "you are talking now more like Eva than like yourself. I should have expected this advice from her, shutting her eyes to obstacles, as she always does, and leaping headlong to results; but it is not at all in keeping with your practical view of things and sound judgment. Think of Agnes's helplessness; think what Uncle John would do with her, away from her mother, during the pain of the operation, and the long tedious confinement in a darkened room afterward!"

"I know all that, papa. I know that it will not be a pleasure trip either to Agnes or Uncle John, and that there will be much inconvenience, trouble, and anxiety on his part, probably much suffering on hers, and perhaps disappointment on the part of both. But, for all that, I think it is worth the trial; and if it rested with me to make the decision, I would not hesitate a moment."

"You are a true, brave woman, Julia," exclaimed Uncle John. "If we all fixed our eyes more on results and less on obstacles, there would be fewer failures in the world; but I don't know how it is, I never can shut my eyes to difficulties."

"I do not think it is desirable that you should, Uncle John," she answered, modestly. "On the contrary, I think you ought to look at them, weigh them, and try to overcome them, but not be dismayed by them. In this case, however, I do not see any that even at first seem insurmountable. They are grave and serious, but I think you will find that you can overcome them."

"What do you think of the one that your father mentioned just now,—her mother's consent? It is asking a great deal of a mother to send a blind, helpless child three thousand miles away, to submit to a painful operation, the result of which is doubtful at the best."

"So it is, Uncle John; but against that sacrifice the mother must weigh the possibility of giving sight to that blind child. She is a mother, and as such must feel keenly the pain of separation under such circumstances; but, on the other hand, she must,

and no doubt will, feel that she has no right to condemn her child to the certainty of a life-long night, rather than herself endure the suspense and anxiety of a few short months. No, Uncle John, I do not think that you need fear an insurmountable obstacle in the mother. She will probably be startled at first by the proposition; but the more she thinks of it, the more she will be convinced that she ought to accede to it. I think that you will find a much greater difficulty in gaining the consent of Agnes herself, and I am quite sure that her mother will not send her unless she is willing to go."

"Nor would I compel her, Julia, under the circumstances; but I believe that if I can gain Grace's hearty co-operation, she can persuade Agnes. She is very easily influenced by her mother."

"Poor little Agnes!" said Eva, compassionately. "Blind, helpless, suffering, and among strangers! Surely, Uncle John, you are not going to take her alone, without even a servant!"

"Yes, Eva, if I take her at all, it must be under all these disadvantages. I cannot afford more than the expense of two, besides the surgeon's fee, which will be a heavy one if he performs an operation. Yes, I must take Agnes alone. I shall take good care of her, though," he added, cheerfully. "You have no idea what a good nurse old Uncle John will prove!"

"I don't doubt it in the least, Uncle John," answered Julia. "Agnes may want her mother, but I am quite sure that she will not suffer for want of any attention that even her mother could render. You will be the sufferer in the case, for it will be a very heavy charge upon you."

"I do not regard that at all, my daughter. Any expense or personal inconvenience must be accounted as the dust in the balance in comparison with the advantage to be gained; and even if the experiment should prove a failure, it will be a satisfaction to know that we have tried every means."

"Is there no surgeon in this country that would do as well as the one in Paris?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"I do not know, sir. The one that I am going to in Paris I do know both professionally and personally. He stands at the head of his profession there, and inasmuch as the opinion of no other man now living could entirely satisfy me, I prefer to submit the case to him at once. If he tells me that nothing can be done for her, I shall believe it."

"Uncle John," said Eva, "don't let him operate on her eyes unless he is sure of success. It would be dreadful to subject the child to unnecessary suffering."

"He himself, Eva, will be the best judge of that. If I put Agnes in his hands, it will be to do with her as he thinks best,

with this one condition; if he thinks the result very doubtful, I will not subject her to the operation without her entire consent. I shall make this promise both to herself and her mother before I take her from home."

"Uncle John," asked Eva, "what is that paper in your hand that you have been twisting into a little roll for the last half hour? If it ever was worth anything, it cannot be so now."

"Thank you, for reminding me, Eva. My thoughts are so engrossed with one subject to-night, that I have forgotten all else. This is a letter that I received this morning from your friend, the doctor; I brought it out for you to read, and but for your question I should have carried it back with me. He writes from Rome, and the letter is brimful of Italy. The boy can scarcely find words to express himself, and is continually entangling himself in a maze of superlatives, or tripping up and coming to a dead stop, because language fails him. It is pleasant to see a young life so full of keen relish and ardent enthusiasm. Charles is like you, Eva. You and he look at the barefooted monk, encircled by a hempen cord, the black-eyed beggar child, with her golden ornaments, and the swarming lazzaroni, as so many picturesque figures in the great picture of Italy; while your more practical sister there looks deeper than the surface, and sees underneath it all the ignorance, superstition, degradation, and vice that cling like the plague spot of leprosy to that fair and classic land. This letter is full of paintings and statues, of St. Peter's and the Forum, and Colosseum and the Capitol, of the Dying Gladiator and the Bronze Wolf. Oh, Eva! you will revel in it; Julia, I am afraid, will think it a little too high-strung."

"I am a practical person myself, Uncle John," she answered, without making any allusion to the letter; "but I do not object to romance in others, except," she added with a glance at Eva, "when it is so excessive that it scorns those everyday duties so necessary to the comfort of a family."

"Now, Uncle John," said Eva, "if you believe sister, you will think that I never did a useful thing in my life, when only this morning I helped to wash the tea things!"

"Why, Eva, you don't tell me so!" said Uncle John, laughing. "You certainly did not come down from the clouds so low as that!"

"Yes, sir, she did," said Julia; "and, more than that, she actually laid aside her novel while she did it!"

"Oh, what a fall was there!" exclaimed Uncle John. "From love, and romance, and sentiment, down to washing tea things!"

"Come, come, Uncle John," said Mr. Cameron, "you and

Julia must not be too severe upon the child. You will yet see her one of these days a famous housewife."

"Yes," he replied, pulling one of her curls; "who knows but when I come back from Europe I may find her making preserves and pickles, and attending to the dairy as industriously and as successfully as her sister."

"I am afraid you must be going to stay a long time, then," said Julia, quietly.

"How long are you going to stay, Uncle John?" asked Eva.

"That depends upon circumstances. If there is no war, I shall return in September or October; I wish to spend the hot months in Switzerland, with Agnes: but if war is declared, I shall return the very moment that it is safe to bring her."

"I believe, in that event, I would stay there until it was over; but no, you could not do that either, for you could not keep Agnes so long away from her mother."

"I should not remain, under any circumstances, Eva. If the country is plunged in war, every man should be at home ready to do his duty."

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW days afterward, Grace called Agnes away from the organ, saying:

"Come here, my daughter, I have something to say to you."

There was a constraint and rigidity in her tone which the child detected at once, and she asked, half frightened:

"What is it, mother? what is the matter?"

"There is nothing the matter," she replied, quietly. "I only want to talk to you."

Agnes took her seat in the little chair by her mother's side, and took hold of her hand, which was a habit she had whenever she was talking to her.

Grace turned her head aside, just in time to prevent a tear from falling upon the little hand.

As Julia had predicted, Grace had been startled by Uncle John's proposition, but she had carefully reflected upon it before she gave an answer. At first, she felt that a separation from her helpless child at such a crisis was not to be thought of for a moment; she did not believe that human skill could give her

sight, and she thought that the torture that she must necessarily undergo, would be, in the event of failure, nothing less than cruelty. The longer, however, that she reflected upon it, the clearer her duty became, and, as Julia had said, she felt that the mother's selfish feeling must give way to the best interests of the child. By far the bitterest element in her grief was the thought of Agnes's loneliness among strangers and foreigners; her own suspense and anxiety were nothing in comparison with the vain and helpless longing of that childish heart for her mother's care and love. But even all this she dared not weigh for an instant against the bare possibility of her recovered sight. Agnes's life was lonely and desolate enough now, with her mother to take care of her; what would it be if she should outlive that mother, as she probably would do, and should be left without parent, brother, or sister, to lighten her darkness or comfort her loneliness? Could she doom her to such a life because she had not the fortitude to endure the pain of separation? These were thoughts that she had carefully weighed, and her duty was now very clear. Since Providence had opened the way and provided the means for the experiment, it was her part thankfully to receive what might prove the greatest blessing of her life, and bravely to bear up under its accompanying trials. She did not mention the subject to Agnes for several days. Indeed, the very sight of the child was painful, and she had talked as little as possible to her upon any subject, fearing, lest by some unconscious word or tone, she might betray to the quick ear that she had some unusual sorrow. She had promised Uncle John to do her best to persuade Agnes, but she would not consent to compel her; she would reason with her calmly and truthfully, neither ignoring nor disguising the probable suffering, and trying to make her realize the possible benefit, and then she would leave her to decide for herself. She had been trying for days to fortify herself, before talking to Agnes about it, and she felt truly thankful that the child, in her darkness, was all unconscious of the struggle that was going on in her mother's breast, so evident to others in her haggard face and tearful eyes.

She thought that she was now able to talk it over calmly; but the intuition that had caught alarm from the tone of her very first words, told her how very far she had overestimated her self-control.

The tears fell rapidly from her eyes, and she tried in vain to keep them back; but they flowed silently, and were unsuspected by the blind child, who could not understand the stillness. She waited several minutes, and then said:

"Why don't you talk, mother? You said you wanted to talk

to me? Your voice sounds strange and troubled; are you troubled, mother?"

The little hand wandered in search of the mother's face, to learn by its unerring touch if it were smooth and calm, or stained with tears.

Grace quickly caught it, and holding it firmly in her own, summoned all her self-control, and said:

"Yes, my daughter, I have something to say to you. Your mother and Uncle John and all your friends are grieved at your blindness and helplessness, and if it is possible, would do anything to give you sight like other children. Uncle John knows one physician, and only one, that he would be willing to trust you with, and he lives a long distance from here; but if you will consent, Uncle John says that he himself will take you to him, and stay with you and nurse you if an operation is performed on your eyes; and, with God's blessing, he may bring you home with eyes as keen and far-seeing as those of any of your little companions. It may be, my daughter, that you need not wait to get to heaven to learn what light and sunshine are. What do you say, Agnes?"

"Where is he going to take me, mother?"

"To Paris, Agnes."

"To Paris! that big city you told me was so far across the water?"

"Yes, my daughter, there."

"How far from home is it, mother?"

"More than three thousand miles."

"You said something about an operation upon my eyes; what do you mean by that?"

"It is to cut something out of your eyes with sharp instruments; or perhaps to put something into them to heal them of the disease that prevents you from seeing."

"Will it hurt me much?"

"Yes, my child, I suspect that it will be very painful; not only at the time, but for weeks afterward, when you will have to stay in a dark room, and suffer much from the inflammation."

"Where will you be, mother, when Uncle John is nursing me?"

"I shall be at home, Agnes," she replied, with a pang, "praying that my Heavenly Father will give light and gladness to my blind child."

"At home, mother!" almost screamed the child. "At home! you at home, and I three thousand miles away suffering so much, with a strange doctor and strange people all around me, and no friend but Uncle John! Oh, mother! what do you, what can you mean?"

The mother's resolution was fast giving way; and instead of persuading Agnes, the child was rapidly convincing her of the impracticability of the whole scheme. Nevertheless, she was determined to be faithful to her promise to Uncle John, and use her best efforts to persuade.

"Agnes," she said, "listen to me. You think that Uncle John loves you very much, because he gave you your organ, and is always doing something to make you happy; but all that he has ever done for you in his life, is nothing in comparison with what he proposes to do for you now. It will cost him a great deal of money; but that is not all. Uncle John is now an old man, and old men who have a comfortable home do not like to leave it and wander about in strange places among strange people. Now he is willing not only to incur all this expense, but also to endure trouble and inconvenience, to say nothing of the great anxiety that he will feel in taking you away from your mother; he is willing to bear all this to try to give you sight. Now, Agnes, don't you see how much Uncle John loves you?"

"Yes, mother, I see it, and I love him for it; but," she added decidedly and peremptorily, "I shall not go with him."

"And be always blind, my daughter?"

She thought a little while, and answered, sadly:

"Yes, mother, always blind. I cannot go away from you."

"Well, Agnes, I shall not insist upon it, for I only promised Uncle John to persuade you; you must decide for yourself."

Grace could not determine whether Agnes's decision gave her most pleasure or pain. She felt that it would be a great satisfaction to have tried the experiment, even if it should prove unsuccessful; and yet it was a feeling of infinite relief to shut out from her thoughts that prospect of anxiety and sorrow which she so much dreaded.

Agnes was generally easily controlled by the slightest expression of her mother's wishes; and very rarely in her life had she taken such a decided stand in opposition to them. Grace was never accustomed to use harsher means with her than persuasion; and she was especially unwilling to do so in the present instance. It was a weakness; but one which might readily be pardoned with such a subject as a blind child, and under such circumstances.

For some minutes they both sat perfectly still, Grace watching Agnes's face, which plainly betrayed some internal struggle. The blind face was almost rigid in its earnestness and severity of expression; and the lines worked convulsively around her mouth, as she said:

"Mother, tell me; is it right for me to go? Is it wrong to say I will not?"

"Yes, my child, I think it is. Agnes, I will suffer more in the separation than you will; God only knows how I can bear it; but I believe that He has placed these means in your way, and that you and I ought to be willing to use them, in order to secure for you, if possible, the greatest of earthly blessings."

"Will I certainly get my eyesight, if I bear all this pain and suffering?"

"No, my daughter, it is not certain; it is only an experiment, and may not be successful; but all that you or we can do is to try."

"Is it possible for me to die, mother, when the doctor operates on my eyes?"

Poor Grace felt as if each successive word stabbed her with a keener pang; but she answered, quietly:

"It is possible, Agnes; but I do not think it is probable."

"It would be hard enough," said Agnes, thoughtfully, "to suffer so far away from mother; but it would be a great deal harder to die there among strangers! I don't know that I can be willing for that." She relapsed into deep thought, and presently she said, suddenly:

"Mother, do you say that it is right to go, and wrong to refuse?"

"I think so, my child."

"Then, mother," she said, with an energy that startled Grace, "I will go!"

The struggle was over, the brow relaxed, and the face softened down into an expression of sadness, indescribably touching, as she repeated:

"I will go, mother; not because I want to go, for, sad and lonely as my life is, I would rather be blind always than to suffer so much away from you; but I will go because it is right!"

Grace was now fairly overcome. She clasped Agnes to her heart and held her there; and felt that in this triumph of right and duty in that childish heart, she herself was, and Uncle John too must be, fully compensated for his kindness; even though hope should end in disappointment, and experiment in failure. The darkened eyes might never be lightened, nor the childish heart gladdened by the blessed sunshine; but the child herself could not be wholly blind, for her soul was full of light!

Presently she said, earnestly:

"God be thanked, my darling, for this willingness to do the thing that is right, even at the expense of pain and suffering! I can let you go now, Agnes, satisfied that He who requires such a spirit, will take care of you while you are away, and bring you back to me, if not with sight restored and perfect, at least the

same blind child that I sent away, dearer to me in her helplessness than all else in the world besides, and the light of her mother's life, if her own is dark."

Agnes sat perfectly still for several minutes, leaning her head upon her mother's lap, her whole attitude indicating weariness.

"Mother," she said, "couldn't you possibly go with me?"

"No, my daughter, you must not think of such a thing; for it is quite impossible. Uncle John will have to take care of you; and he will do it as kindly and tenderly as your mother."

"No, mother," she answered, languidly and drearily, "he can never be what you are, although he is the best Uncle John in the world."

"Agnes, when Uncle John talks to you about going, you must remember how kind it is for him to take you; and you must not tell him that you are not willing to go with him without your mother."

"Yes, mother, I will try."

No more was said; and Agnes, sad and tired, soon fell asleep. When all restraint was removed, Grace gave way; and when Uncle John came in a little while after, he found the mother's tears raining fast over the sleeping child.

"How is this?" he asked, kindly. "Grace, what does this mean?" He had to wait for a reply; and then she told him all the conversation, and the final decision. He was touched, and said, in reply:

"Poor child! she will miss her mother sadly; but God knows I will do whatever an old bachelor can do, to make her comfortable and happy. But I do not think, from your account, that you dwelt sufficiently upon the possibility of there being no operation performed."

"No; because I thought that this would be done under any circumstances; the result being the only test of its use."

"No; I think that the surgeon will know if the operation promises success; and so, after all, Agnes may have no greater pain to bear than the separation from you, and the dread of suffering; that will of course haunt her as long as she is in suspense. The voyage, however, will be exceedingly beneficial to her; especially the return voyage, when she will have nothing to dread, and everything to anticipate with pleasure. Another benefit, by no means inconsiderable, will be the mere fact of her being away from the organ for several months, for she sits there entirely too much. I am sure, Grace," he added, kindly, "that we will neither of us have cause to regret this undertaking. Should our hopes be realized, all our trouble and anxiety will be forgotten in our pleasure; should we be disappointed—but no! I will not admit the possibility of failure."

"I have but little hope, Uncle John, that she will ever be anything else than the same blind child that she is. I do not believe that human skill can reach her case, and I often think——"

She did not finish her sentence, for her thoughts outran her words, and her soul went out yearningly toward Him who, in the days of His humanity, gave light to the blind by a healing touch which was never supplicated in vain.

"Then, Grace," he asked, in a tone of disappointment, "would you rather that she should not go?"

"By no means, Uncle John. I would not for the world let my selfishness interpose an obstacle in the way of so great a blessing; and besides, when I know that everything has been tried without success, there will be a quiet resignation in the certainty that God has decreed her to be blind. No, I want her to go; but, as it is to be, I only wish that the parting was over."

"Your separation will not be a very long one, Grace. I do not propose to be gone longer than six or seven months."

"That is a long time of anxiety and suspense, Uncle John."

"But you will not be in anxiety and suspense half that time. If an operation is to be performed, I will have it done as soon as it is practicable; so that when the warm weather comes, Agnes will be ready to go to Switzerland. I expect that pure air to do much toward giving to her system that tone and strength that it so much needs. Indeed, Grace, you must try and bear up cheerfully, for Agnes's sake as well as for your own. You must not think of her only as enduring a painful exile. There will be much that even she can enjoy; and you may rest assured that whatever pleasure she is capable of, I will see to it that she has. Her love of music alone will afford her great enjoyment, and she shall be gratified to the extent of her wishes."

"I know it, Uncle John, and I have no words to express my gratitude for your kindness to her. It is not that I fail to appreciate it; it is only that every other thought is swallowed up in the single one of separation from a blind and helpless child at such a time."

Uncle John appreciated the mother's feelings, and made no reply. They sat in silence; one pondering the months of sorrow before her, and the other the responsibility that he had assumed, and the months of anxiety before him.

After awhile Agnes awoke with a start and a smile, which quickly subsided into an expression of pain, as dreary recollection returned. Uncle John kept quiet, and he listened in sadness, as the child, now thoroughly awake, said, musingly:

"Mother says that it will not be right to let Uncle John see that I don't want to leave her, and that I must talk cheerfully

about going to Paris. Yes, I will try for his sake, for it may be as great a trial for him to go away as it is for me, and he is doing it all for me. Let me go to the organ, mother; I will feel better when I get there. I could not talk to Uncle John now cheerfully as I ought to do, but I can talk to it."

Her mother led her to the organ, and Uncle John thought that she was literally pouring out all the sadness of her heart in music, and he had never in his life been so deeply touched as he now was by that wail, interpreted by her own words, of which he had been the unsuspected listener.

But for once the organ failed to comfort her, and after a little while she stopped with a sigh, and her hands fell listlessly and wearily into her lap. Uncle John could not bear this, and he sprang up and went to her, not knowing what he was going to say, but only determined in some way to comfort her. He felt almost tempted to tell her that he would not take her away at all, especially when he was greeted by the cheerful words, so painfully contrasting with the sad face and the sad tone with which, in spite of all her efforts, she spoke.

"Uncle John, I am glad that you have come, for I want you to talk to me about Paris, and tell me when we are going, and how long we will stay, and all about it."

"My daughter, I do not intend to take you to Paris at all, unless you are willing to go. If it is possible to give you sight, I would be very glad to do so with your consent, but not without. I would like to leave home early in March, and be gone about six months. It may be, Agnes, that you will have to suffer a great deal, but even that shall not be without your consent. If I find that the success of an operation is doubtful, I will leave it entirely to yourself whether or not you will undergo the pain, and even if the result should be certain, I will not compel you to it."

"I have made up my mind, Uncle John, to be willing to do whatever you think best. I hope that I would not be so foolish, after all your trouble and expense, as to refuse to let the doctor cure me because I am afraid of the pain."

"Perhaps, Agnes, the doctor may say that he cannot do anything for you, and then I will bring you home to your mother just as I took you away, except that we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done all that we could to give you sight. I know, my little daughter, that it will be hard for you to leave your mother, and I wish very much that she could go, but, as this cannot be, I will try to fill her place, and I think we will have, after all, a right pleasant time," he added, cheerfully.

"Did you say that perhaps, after all, the doctor might not do

anything to my eyes?" she asked, grasping at the possible reprieve from the pain that she so much dreaded. "I thought that I would have to bear that any way."

"No, Agnes, I think not. I do not believe that the doctor will undertake it unless he feels reasonably sure of the result."

"I am very glad to hear that," she said; for even the blessedness of sight had seemed to her dearly purchased by the suffering from which childhood shrinks. "I am very glad to hear that."

"And even if I should have to bring you home the same blind child that I took away, I hope that the voyage and travel will benefit you, and that you will find many pleasures that you can enjoy without eyes. I will try and make mine do double duty, and tell you what I see; and I will take you to the great cathedrals, where you can hear magnificent organ-music and fine singing; and when the weather becomes warm in Paris, we will go to Switzerland, a country full of high mountains, whose tops are always covered with snow, and where the air is pure and bracing, and every breath is a pleasure."

Agnes's face brightened, especially when he spoke of music, and she replied:

"I think I will like it very much, Uncle John."

"And then, too, you will like to sail upon the ocean; and I will tell you what I am going to do. I am going to take my old flute that I used to play, such a long, long time ago, for my little child-angel, and whenever it is warm and pleasant, we will sit in the same part of the ship where I used to sit with her, and I will play for you the same old tunes that she loved so much."

Agnes was a grateful child, and she could not but realize the pains that Uncle John would take to make her happy, and she said, earnestly:

"Uncle John, I will try to be just as good and give you as little trouble as I can, and when we get to Paris, I will try very hard to bear my pain patiently, for I feel very grateful to you for being so kind to me."

Uncle John laid his hand upon her head, as he replied: "My child, I don't want you to try and be good, and give me no trouble. I don't want you to feel under restraint with me, and suffer in silence for fear of giving me pain and anxiety. I want you to feel and act with me as you would do with your mother; telling me your wants, and complaining to me as you would to her, when you are suffering."

"If she behaves with you, Uncle John, as she does with her mother," said Grace, "she will not complain often, for that is not her habit. She is generally gentle and patient at home, and she will probably be so with you."

"I shall certainly not object to it, if that is her character ; but I only mean to say that I want her to be with me the same Agnes that she is at home every day, and then I shall be perfectly satisfied."

It was now finally agreed upon that they should sail early in March. Agnes's heart was lightened by Uncle John's cheerfulness, while her mother was proportionably depressed, and discovered for the first time the latent hope that had been lurking in her heart, that something might occur to prevent the accomplishment of plans which she dared not herself take the responsibility of overthrowing. The cheerful conversation had fallen like a knell upon her heart, and she heard their arrangements and the time appointed for their departure with a pang, which she reproached herself for feeling, but which she could not crush.

Uncle John talked so pleasantly about what they would do, and where they would go, that Agnes, with the elastic temper of childhood, began to look forward with pleasure to the voyage ; and when, as he was going away, he said :

"So, my little daughter, you must keep up a brave heart, for, after all, we will have a pleasant time," she answered, cheerfully :

"Yes, I am sure we will ; and if I could only take mother, and my organ, and two or three friends, I would rather go than not."

"Yes, Agnes, that would be more pleasant when you leave home, but not half so pleasant when you return. There would be no pleasure in coming back, if you had no friends to meet and to welcome you home."

Uncle John departed, satisfied with the result of his visit ; and Grace went off by herself to weep away some of the burden of her heart ; and Agnes played on, and the music was full of serene hope and contentment.

CHAPTER X.

THE weeks had rolled rapidly by, too rapidly for Grace, who dreaded more and more the approaching separation.

It was now the night before the departure, a wild, stormy night in March, and Uncle John and the family were seated around the fire in the library at Cameron Hall. He had come out in the afternoon to say good-by, and the girls had, in spite of wind and weather, kept him until after tea.

The little family party, usually so gay and cheerful, were now silent and sad. In ordinary circumstances, there would have been scarcely enough to have occasioned this; but now the girls thought sadly of the probable suffering of Agnes, and Uncle John and Mr. Cameron, of the possible change that might come over their peaceful and prosperous country before they should meet again.

These had formed the themes of conversation for the greater part of the evening, until a cloud was upon every heart, when suddenly Uncle John said, cheerfully:

"Come, girls, this will never do; our last evening must not be so doleful. My rule is always to look at the bright side: until Agnes has been pronounced hopelessly blind, we must expect her to receive her sight; and until there is a positive declaration of war, we must hope for a continuation of peace. Never let possible future evils take away the pleasure from present blessings."

"That is precisely my doctrine, Uncle John!" exclaimed the buoyant Eva. "I believe that there is a bright side to every picture, even to war. I still think that I will like to see the handsome officers and gay uniforms, and listen to the fine bands of music."

"There is one young fellow in Europe, Eva, who will have to come home in case of war. You will disown your knight if he does not, won't you?"

"You will persist, Uncle John, in calling him my knight, while I assure you that I have no part nor lot in him. But, indeed, he ought to come home; he would make a splendid-looking officer."

"I must look him up and bring him back," said Uncle John. "What shall I tell him, Eva?"

"No message from me, sir, would influence his movements; but one from sister might."

"Why, Eva," said Uncle John, laughing, "I am afraid that you underrate your influence; you certainly are one of 'the Cameron sisters' whom he always mentions together."

"Yes, sir, and a very useful one too; even he himself would have to acknowledge that. A blind is sometimes invaluable. Come, sister," she added, "you can send the only available message from 'the Cameron sisters'; what shall it be?"

Julia was sewing quietly when the conversation began, but as it went on, her fingers moved more rapidly and nervously. Eva still delighted to tease her, and had never suspected that it was any more painful to her than to be teased about any other ac-

quaintance. Had Julia even once expressed a wish that she should desist, she would have done so, for she was a kind-hearted child, and devoted to her sister; but Julia was unwilling for Eva or any one else to suspect the feelings that she was struggling against, and which she honestly believed that she was overcoming; and so she bore in silence, and tried to submit with indifference to Eva's raillery. But she could not become accustomed to it; it was not only disagreeable, but it was positively painful, and sometimes her patience and equanimity could not bear the test, and she would reply with a sharpness that startled Eva. She did not make any reply to the question now asked, but sewed on. But Eva repeated it.

"You must not pretend, sister, that you are so absorbed in that work that you do not hear. Hemming a pocket handkerchief is not such intricate work that it requires undivided attention. Say, what message are you going to send?"

"A message to whom, and about what, Eva?"

"Now, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, "did you ever know such affectation? who would have expected it from my straightforward sister? The message, sister, is to Dr. Beaufort, whom Uncle John expects to meet in Europe; about what, I really cannot tell, as you are the best judge of that."

"I suspect, Eva, that if I were to send a message to Dr. Beaufort he would be as much surprised to receive it as I should be to find myself sending it."

"Well, indeed, I do not see anything very extraordinary in it. I know that I should not hesitate to send one, and should never dream that there was any impropriety in it."

"I did not say that there was, Eva; that is your own inference. I only said that he and I would be alike astonished if I did. You always talk as if he and I were old friends, and never seem to remember that we are strangers, and that the whole of our intercourse in the past, and most probably in the future too, was comprised within three or four weeks."

"Not such very great strangers after all!" she answered; "if you were, you both seemed at the time quite as forgetful of the fact as I have been since. But even if it were so, that is no reason why you should not send him a message."

Julia was annoyed, but she could not help smiling at Eva's persistency, and she answered:

"Perhaps not, if I had one to send; but inasmuch as I have nothing in the world to communicate, a message becomes simply impossible. If one is absolutely necessary, I leave you to send it, and shall await with some curiosity to know what it can be about."

"It will certainly be about you," she replied, while her eyes sparkled mischievously.

"Then," said Julia, with energy and decision, "you certainly will not send it."

"Yes I will, and Uncle John will take it too,—won't you, Uncle John?"

"No," said Julia, "not if I particularly request, as I do now, that my name shall never be mentioned to him."

"But, sister, suppose that he should ask Uncle John about you, as he certainly will do? He will be obliged to answer his questions."

"If he speaks of us at all, Eva, he will probably inquire of us together, as he mentions us in his letters."

"Well, if he does, sister, the same answers will not do for both. We are two entirely distinct individuals, as unlike in character as we are in appearance, and each of us is, I think, worth a separate answer."

"Dr. Beaufort will probably not mention us to Uncle John at all, Eva; there is no reason why he should."

"Oh, sister! what a ——! You don't often sin that way, but this time you were certainly overcome. Now you know very well that he will not only ask in general terms, but he will inquire particularly about us; about me, because I am your sister, and about you, because——but he knows best why."

"You are the most provoking child, Eva!" said Julia, more annoyed than she cared to show, and yet afraid positively to forbid the raillery; and so Eva went on, and Uncle John listened, amused.

"Suppose that Dr. Beaufort should ask Uncle John if Miss Cameron is married yet, and instead of answering the question, Uncle John should say that he had been forbidden by Miss Cameron to mention her name to him; how would that do?"

"That question, it would be easy enough to answer."

"Then comes question second: is she engaged to be married?—what then?"

"He will say that he does not know."

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed Eva, "tell a falsehood! surely you don't mean that?"

"By no means, Eva. Uncle John cannot know whether I am to be married or not, for I never said a word to him upon the subject in my life."

"But don't Uncle John know that if you were engaged I would have told him long ago, even if you had not?"

"That is proof positive," said Mr. Cameron, laughing, in which

he was joined by Uncle John, and even by Julia herself, who presently, however, answered gravely:

"Eva, Dr. Beaufort will never ask Uncle John that question."

"Why not, sister?"

"Because he is a gentleman, Eva, and a gentleman will not ask that question of any other than the lady herself. If he is interested in her, he has no right to seek to know from others his probable success; if he is indifferent to her, it is no business of his, and he will have too much delicacy to pry into what concerns him not."

"But, sister, a gentleman likes to save himself the pain of refusal. It is not trying to find out from another her feelings toward himself; it is only asking if the way is clear."

"Still, the true manly way is to find it out from herself alone. Nor need he necessarily subject himself to the pain of refusal. A true woman, with a true woman's heart, will never encourage feelings which she designs shall end in disappointment; and a man of ordinary penetration can generally discover if his feelings are likely to be responded to, and that, too, without any compromise of maidenly reserve."

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed Eva, laughing, "you will never make a heroine in the world. I did hope that some of these days we would have a little romance at Cameron Hall; but if we do, I am afraid that I shall have to be the heroine, and then all the fun will be gone. I would a great deal rather read a novel, than be myself one of its characters. I see plainly that you will never do for a heroine; you are too matter-of-fact. Just think what would become of a novel if the hero scorned everything except a plain, straightforward course, and the heroine disdained all concealments,—a single page would wind up the whole! I am astonished at you, sister, to have so little poetry in your composition."

"Nature unkindly gave to my younger sister both her own and my share of that desirable element," answered Julia, smiling, "and I was left with only the prosaic. However, Eva, if I do take a practical, rather than a sentimental view of a love affair, I look at it simply in its bearing upon my own happiness. With my disposition (and for that I am not responsible) my happiness requires frank, ingenuous dealing; and no man who did not pursue this course in a love affair, as well as in anything else, could gain my esteem or affection."

"Well, Julia," said Uncle John, "if nature gave you too little of the poetic element, she has, by way of compensation, given

you more than the usual share of truthfulness, honesty, and candor. You admit that, Eva, don't you?"

"Oh yes, Uncle John, of these she has a double share. I find no fault whatever in the foundation of her character, for it is the solid, substantial granite. It is only in the superstructure that I would like a little poetic fancy work; like the delicate tracery and carved work of the Gothic architecture, it would give grace and lightness, without impairing its strength and solidity."

"Were your sister's character other than it is, Eva," said Uncle John, "your description might perhaps tempt me to wish to lighten it by poetic fancy; but as it is, I would not alter it. I like Julia best as she is."

"Of course you do, Uncle John. Nobody ever dreamed that you could think that her character might be improved."

"I did not say so, Eva. Julia, I dare say, has her faults like the rest of us; but I have learned to know and love her as she is; and while I would, in the abstract, like to have her faultless, yet I should surely miss her imperfections if she were to lose them; and as to the general outlines of her character, I would not for the world have them changed."

"Oh, Uncle John!" said Julia, deprecatingly, "don't talk so. You talk as if my faults were few and small; but indeed you do not know me. You are not always with me; and then, too, you are a partial judge; you are only disposed to look at me, as you do at everything else, on the bright side."

"I am disposed to look at you as you are, my daughter; and I think, too, that I know you pretty well; and if I needed any help in understanding you, I should get it from the tell-tale Eva here, whose thoughts and feelings flow through her lips as naturally as water runs through a sieve." No, Julia, I am satisfied that you show yourself to me in your true character."

"As she does to everybody else," said her father. "Julia is the same in the parlor that she is everywhere else. No, I do her injustice. I think that she shines less in the parlor than in any other department of the house."

"I thought so," replied Uncle John, quietly.

"And in which department do I shine most, papa?" inquired Eva.

"In the romantic, my daughter, if there be such a department in an old-fashioned Virginia country-house."

"I think," said Uncle John, "from the stress that she lays upon the act, that Eva's specialty must be washing cups and saucers. I heard her only a few days ago boasting of some wonderful and successful efforts in that line."

"Now, Uncle John!" began Eva; but Julia interrupted her by saying:

"That is right, Uncle John; it is her time now. Let her see if circumstances do not alter cases, in teasing as well as in some other things. Perhaps she will find that it loses much of its relish and piquancy, when the verb is conjugated in the passive instead of the active voice."

"I must plead for Eva, Uncle John," said Mr. Cameron. "Indeed, I am quite satisfied with both my daughters just as they are. As Cameron Hall was to be lightened by the presence of two, nature has wisely made them different, though not dissimilar. Julia shall be the solid substantial architecture, and Eva shall be the ornamental moulding and delicate tracery; and by blending the two we shall have a beautiful specimen of the florid Gothic."

"Thank you, papa," said Eva. "If it were not for you, I should be entirely overwhelmed by the combined forces of my antagonists."

"Eva," said Uncle John, "I hope to be somewhere in the neighborhood of Cameron Hall when your love affair is progressing. Of course so sentimental and unpractical a damsel as yourself will make a romance of it; and I want to read the novel of which you are heroine, as you wanted to read the one of which your sister was the heroine. There is, however, one insuperable obstacle in the way of your plot."

"What is that, Uncle John?"

"It is the frankness and openness of your character. It will be so utterly opposed to your nature to involve yourself in the mystery and concealment necessary for a novel, that after an effort or two you will give it up in disgust, and come to papa and Uncle John and sister, and tell them all about it with just as much straightforward simplicity and candor as the practical sister of whom you have just been complaining. You are not like Julia in your temperament; but I am sadly afraid that you will find in yourself just as little material to make a heroine."

"Perhaps so, Uncle John," she replied, laughing; "but I never intended to have any concealment from my family and from you. I only designed to be more reserved to my lover, and not make him happy all at once, as sister would; but I would keep him in doubt and suspense awhile, so that when he attained the goal of his hopes he would the more fully appreciate it."

"All this does very well in a fancy sketch, Eva; but whenever you are able to conceal your feelings, whenever you learn so to control your words, looks, and actions, that neither shall betray the love boiling and seething in your heart, then you will no

longer be Eva Cameron. No, child, your lover will not be held any longer in suspense than will your sister's; if you do not make him instantly happy by words, your face will betray you. Didn't you tell me a long time ago that you could never imitate your sister's wonderful silence and self-command?"

"Oh, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, in pretended dismay, "what did you tell for?"

"I have told nothing at all, Eva."

"What wonderful self-command? what silence?" inquired Julia, anxiously.

"Don't tell her, Uncle John," said Eva. "Don't you remember, sister, immediately after our return from the Springs last year, I was telling Uncle John one day all about our visit, when, for some reason best known to yourself, you suddenly disappeared in Virgil's convenient way of disposing of people—you 'vanished into thin air?' Well, it was during this absence that I told him a little secret about you and the doctor."

Julia colored, and Uncle John said:

"Oh, Eva, Eva! Can't you let your sister alone for five minutes?"

"I wonder," said Julia, recovering herself, "that she does not get tired teasing me. So patient and uncomplaining a subject, I should think, would weary her; and one so indifferent would disgust her. Sometimes, Uncle John, when she is weaving her fancy sketches about Dr. Beaufort, or some other of my imaginary beaux, my head is full of thoughts of those sublunary things that she scorns, and I am wondering if Mammy Nancy has fed the chickens, and if Aunt Fanny has finished churning."

"How flattering to the doctor's vanity!" exclaimed Eva. "Uncle John, be sure to remember this among your pleasant pictures of Cameron Hall, and assure him of the high place that he occupies in the thoughts of one of 'the Cameron sisters,' and tell him she says that whenever his name is mentioned, it is at once suggestive of the lofty themes of chickens and churning!"

"I think that I must decline being the bearer of such a message as that, Eva," he answered, laughing. "Your sister must send a more acceptable one, or I will not take it."

"It was hers, not mine, Uncle John," said Julia. "I never designed it for anybody's ear except your own."

"Come, girls," he said, "it is getting late, and I must go. So be quick now and give me your messages to our absent friend. What shall I say for you, Julia?"

"Nothing at all, Uncle John; I told you that some time ago. There is nothing either that he will care to hear, or I to say."

"Then, Uncle John," said Eva, "tell him from me that I

should be very glad to renew our pleasant acquaintance, and that I hope to see him before long at the Hall; and tell him, moreover, that sister would say so too, if she didn't have too much propriety."

Julia laughed, and said quietly:

"It is well for us both, Eva, that you have so discreet a messenger; one who knows us both too well to misunderstand us, and loves us too well to misrepresent us. You may send any message that you please; I am perfectly willing to intrust it to Uncle John's discretion what part to deliver, and what part to withhold."

Eva looked at her, with her face and eyes beaming, and said:

"Uncle John, I'll wager that I know something that would induce sister, with all her propriety, to send Dr. Beaufort a message."

"That is very probable, Eva," replied Julia, quietly. "I know a great many things that would."

"But I know one thing specially."

Julia sewed on and made no reply, and Uncle John, by way of gratifying her, asked:

"And what is that, Eva?"

"In case of war, if Dr. Beaufort should be indifferent about coming home, and sister thought he ought to come, and that a message from her would influence him to do so, she would not hesitate a moment. All her propriety would be forgotten then, and she would send such a long one, Uncle John, that you would have to write it down; you could not remember it all."

"Indeed, Eva," said Julia, forgetting everything in her earnestness, "indeed you are greatly mistaken. If there is in Dr. Beaufort so little of true manhood that he needs a woman's persuasion to induce him to fight the battles of his country, his service would not be worth having. If he has no higher principles of action, no clearer conceptions of duty, no stronger will than to need a woman to bolster him up, then there is not soul enough in him to make a soldier; and Julia Cameron would be the last woman in the South to try it!"

"Bravo, Julia!" cried Uncle John, clapping his hands. "I wish I could repeat that speech, just as it was uttered, tone, manner, words, and all, and I promise you that Charles Beaufort should have the benefit of it."

"I did not make it for his benefit, Uncle John, nor with special reference to him; what I have said applies to every man in the South."

"Eva," said Uncle John, "I think that there is a lull in the storm now. Go see, my child, for you are younger than I am."

Eva obeyed, and returned, saying :

"It is not raining just now, Uncle John, but the wind is blowing very hard, and the sky is as black as ink. Indeed, you will be obliged to stay ; I am sure that you cannot drive such a night as this."

"Nevertheless, I must try, Eva. My horse and I know the road so well that we can go from here to town almost without sight. Order the buggy immediately, and perhaps I can get home before it rains again."

It was at the door in a few minutes, and the farewell words had been spoken.

"God bless you, my friend, and my daughters," he said as he grasped three hands in both his ; "God bless and keep you, and grant that we may meet again before long in health and happiness."

"And peace," added Mr. Cameron.

"Yes, and *peace*," said they all, solemnly.

The girls were sincerely grieved to part with Uncle John, for they knew well how sorely they would miss his cheerful face and pleasant company. Julia helped him with his overcoat and gloves, and busied herself waiting upon him to the very last, quiet as was her wont, while only a few silent tears, quickly brushed away, bore witness to her sorrow ; while the more impulsive Eva stood by sobbing. Julia opened the hall door so that the light from the lamp might guide him to his buggy ; but in an instant a blast swept through, and, extinguishing the lamp, left them in utter darkness.

"Never mind, girls," he said, "I can find my way."

He groped his way along to the buggy, and as he drove off, the wind bore back his parting words : "God bless you ! God bless you !"

A dreary ride had Uncle John in the lonely midnight, beneath an inky sky, with not even the lightning flash occasionally to illumine the black darkness around. Though he was naturally cheerful, yet his thoughts were now sad, and the object of his mission and its uncertainty weighed heavily upon his heart. He was obliged to drive very slowly, and with no companions except his own anxious thoughts and the howling wind, that rose and fell in fitful blasts, the way seemed interminable. At last, he reached town just as the rain began to pour again in torrents upon the already flooded streets. Not a light was to be seen anywhere. Everything was locked in profound slumber, and the storm raged without, while the unconscious sleepers within knew nothing of its fury. As he turned the corner of a street, he saw one feeble light glimmering in the distance, and it seemed like

the welcome light of the polar star to the tempest-tossed mariner.

"Some lonely watcher," he thought, "perhaps beside the bed of the sick or dying."

But as he drove on, even above the roar of the tempest he heard a low, deep sound, which to a more poetic temperament might have seemed a mighty sob of nature's great heart. But Uncle John was no poet. He drew the reins and stopped there in the pelting storm, listening to catch the sound again, and when it came, not loud, but deep and distinct, he said to himself:

"Yes, I cannot be mistaken. It is Agnes at the organ, and at this hour of the night!"

As he advanced the sound became more distinct, and the light was plainly visible in the cottage. He stopped there and entered noiselessly. His step was arrested at the threshold, and, with his hand upon the knob of the door, he stood spell-bound, listening, how long he knew not, to the strain which he could not interrupt. When it ceased, he went in, and, as he opened the door, Grace started, but Agnes recognized his step in an instant.

"My child," he said kindly, but reproachfully, "what does this mean? To-morrow you will go upon a long journey, which will require all your strength, and when you ought to have been asleep hours ago, I find you, after twelve o'clock at night, exhausting yourself in this way. Oh! Grace, Grace," he added, looking at her, "you ought not to have permitted this."

"I could not help it, Uncle John," she replied.

"Nor could you, Uncle John," said Agnes. "You never could have had the heart to refuse to let me say farewell to mother, when I am going to leave her to-morrow for so long a time. And that is all that I have been doing; just saying all night, through the organ, 'Good-by, mother, good-by!'"

To this, Uncle John did not reply. If he himself could not interrupt this good-by strain, he could not wonder that the mother did not.

Agnes asked no permission to go on, but poured out her feelings, with childish unrestraint, upon the organ. She needed no words to interpret her music; it was plainly a farewell. She played on without interruption from her listeners, and Uncle John, like Grace, forgot the hour. At last, however, nature asserted her rights, and the exhausted child could bear no more. The music ceased; and when Uncle John and Grace looked up, her hands were lying idly in her lap, and her head drooped upon her shoulder; the child-musician, lulled by her own music, was sleeping sweetly and profoundly.

Uncle John arose and went quietly to the organ, where he stood for a few moments, looking in silence at the little sleeper. When he raised his eyes, there too stood Joe, who had left his post, as he always did, whenever the music ceased. He was gazing fixedly at Agnes, and there were two tears upon his cheeks, the first evidence of emotion that Uncle John had ever seen in him. Agnes's plaintive farewell to mother and friends had mysteriously touched some chord which had never vibrated before, and the idiot caught a fleeting impression of her meaning. The blind had spoken to the blind!

CHAPTER XI.

It was a clear bright day, and, from a cloudless sky, the sun looked down upon the broad, blue expanse of the Atlantic, with its foam-crested waves sparkling as if sprinkled with diamonds. The air was very keen and cold, but there were two of the passengers who could not consent to be imprisoned below, and who, muffled in shawls and furs and a buffalo robe, and buried in a sail to shield them from the wind, were sitting in the bow of the steamer.

A week had passed since the travelers had left home. The parting was over; the farewell had been spoken; and though there could be for Agnes no new sights and scenes, still there were new sounds and new voices, and Uncle John devoted himself untiringly to amuse and interest her. Everybody was kind to her. None of the passengers could pass her without a kind word or a gentle touch, and the kind-hearted sailors looked compassionately on her as Uncle John led her in their daily walk up and down the deck. She did not know that she was the special object of interest on the ship. Her gentleness and thankful acknowledgment of the smallest kindness won all hearts, and her blindness awakened universal sympathy. She missed her organ sorely, but she did not complain, nor was she entirely without employment or amusement. For the first time in her life she resorted to singing and to the piano. She sang the songs that she had learned from Eva, and would sing on deck by the hour; one after another being drawn to her side, until quite a group, of which she was the unconscious center, would be gathered around

her; and when it was too cold to be on deck, and she was confined to the saloon, she amused herself at the piano, dissatisfied, it is true, with her own music, but the wonder and delight of those who listened and remembered that it was nothing but the natural language of a blind child.

There was something inspiring in the fresh westerly breeze, as it swelled the sails and sped the steamer rapidly onward, and Uncle John seemed to drink in hope and buoyancy with the pure air and glorious sunshine. Agnes, with the elasticity of childhood, had rebounded from the sorrow of parting with her mother, and satisfied with the love and the care of Uncle John, had regained her accustomed cheerfulness. Taking a long, deep breath, she said:

"Oh, Uncle John! this air is so delicious! I can feel it making me strong. What wind is it to-day?"

"The same that we had yesterday, Agnes; a westerly wind, and it is sending us rapidly across the ocean."

"A westerly wind!" she repeated. "Then it comes from home; no wonder that it is so pleasant! I wish that it could bring me messages from mother and my friends."

"What messages would you like to have, Agnes?"

"I would like for the wind to tell me how much mother misses me, and wants to see me, and that they will not forget me at the Hall, and that Mr. Derby, when he asks God to bless his own little children, will remember me, too."

"Those would be pleasant messages, my daughter; but I don't think that you need wait for the wind to bring them to you; your own heart will tell you that if your mother and friends could speak to you this moment, they would tell you just what you would like for the breeze to say."

"Yes, Uncle John, I believe they would. Everybody is kind to me; everybody loves me. This is a pleasant world even to a blind child."

"I am glad, Agnes, that you have found it so. I think, however, that much of your happiness is derived from yourself. You are cheerful and contented, thankful for your blessings instead of complaining of your affliction."

"Yes, sir, I am thankful; but, then, I have so much to be thankful for. I have the best mother in the world, the best Uncle John in the world, and such good kind friends, and my dear organ. I should be a very ungrateful child if I were discontented."

"You certainly ought to be grateful for these blessings, Agnes; but some children, instead of being bright and cheerful like you are, would be sad and unhappy, because they could not see."

"I should be very sad if I could not hear; although, even then, I would try not to complain. But oh, Uncle John! what would I do if I could not hear? Never to know what music is; never to hear the sound of the organ; never to hear mother's voice and yours,—that would indeed be hard to bear! I am so thankful that God made me blind instead of deaf!"

To this conversation there had been an unnoticed listener, a dark, gloomy-looking man, in the prime of life, who was sitting not far off, with his back toward them, gazing abstractedly into the ocean. Uncle John knew that he was there, for he saw him there in the same place every day; but his presence had never imposed any restraint upon the conversation, for the stranger's thoughts always seemed to be far away, and he was apparently unconscious of their presence. Now, however, he suddenly and involuntarily turned round, and looked in wonder upon the blind child, who could thus speak of her infirmity. He said not a word; he did not appear to see Uncle John at all, or if he did, he did not think of him; he only sat and surveyed the child with a long, scrutinizing stare. Uncle John was annoyed. He could not bear to have Agnes's infirmity the object of curious gaze, nor could he talk to her without restraint when the eyes and ears of a stranger were so riveted upon them. He had sought this part of the steamer because here they were alone and uninterrupted in their conversation, and Agnes and he could talk together as freely as they were accustomed to do at home. He waited a few moments, but the gaze was not removed; then he tried to make the stranger aware of his presence by returning his stare; but he was entirely unconscious that anybody was there except Agnes.

At last Uncle John's patience was exhausted, and he said:

"Come, daughter, let us go down into the saloon."

"Oh no, Uncle John, I cannot bear that saloon; it is so close. Please let us stay here, where we can feel the fresh wind upon our faces. I am not cold."

Her words recalled the stranger's consciousness, and murmuring something inaudibly, he went off hurriedly, and mounting upon the wheel-house, drew his shawl closely around him, and sat down there to look out upon the ocean with that same abstracted air.

"He is very polite," said Uncle John.

"Who is that, Uncle John?" she asked.

"I do not know, Agnes; I only know that he is a very uncivil man."

"Why, Uncle John?"

"Because he stared at you just now in a way that would have been intolerable to you if you could have seen him."

"But perhaps he knew that I would not care; that I could not see."

"That makes no difference, Agnes. It is not pleasant to me to have you gazed at in that way, and he must have known it. He is either very rude or very absent, and looks as if he might be unhappy."

"Is this the first time that you have seen him, Uncle John?"

"No, I have seen him every day since we left New York. He is gloomy and unsocial, and spends all his time here on deck by himself. I have never been here, day or night, that he was not in that same place, puffing away vigorously at his cigar, which seems to be his only comfort and companion. As I lead you by him every day, he raises his eyes and looks dreamily at us as we pass, and then fastens them again on the ocean, which he never grows tired of looking at. He gazed at you just now as he does at the water, intently, fixedly. I cannot imagine what he means by it."

"He does not mean anything, Uncle John. From what you say, he must be lonely and unhappy. Perhaps he wants somebody to talk to him. Why don't you talk to him, and ask him if he is unhappy, and what makes him so?"

"Because, Agnes," he replied, laughing, "in the first place, it is none of my business; and in the second, he would think me very impertinent if I did."

"But perhaps you could do something for him!"

"No, Agnes, I have employment enough in taking care of you, and I have enough pleasant acquaintances on the steamer, without seeking any more, especially one like him. I do not like his appearance; he has a bad countenance."

"If he is bad, Uncle John, I don't want to have anything to do with him; but if he is only sad, and has nobody to talk to him, I would like to keep him company sometimes."

"Why, daughter, are you growing tired of Uncle John; do you want some other company? If you do, there are others here who are much more suitable companions for you."

"Oh no, Uncle John!" she answered, hastily. "It is not that I am tired of you, for I would rather be with you than anybody else; but I only thought that if he is lonely, and has no friends, I would be one to him. Even a blind child-friend may be better than none at all."

"I don't know that he would think so, Agnes. Indeed, from his appearance and manner, I don't believe that he cares to have any friends. So let us leave him to his own gloomy solitude, and talk about something pleasanter."

And then he talked to her of the sunshine that sparkled upon

the waters, which she knew and loved, because it beamed warm and pleasant upon her face; of the little bird, whose dimensions he measured upon her own small hand, and whose unwearied wing carries him so far out to sea, who sometimes rests like a speck upon the top of the tall mast, or is borne like a tiny plaything upon the waves, to which he unhesitatingly commits himself. Agnes asked many questions about the ocean-bird. She had never heard of it before, and she liked to talk about it: so small, yet so fearless; roving so far over the trackless waste, yet never lost; resting so confidently upon the waters, treacherous to all else except the trusting bird. All this awakened her interest, and promised to furnish a theme of conversation whose novelty would not wear out during the voyage. Then they talked of home and friends; of the music in Paris; and then, greatest pleasure of all, their welcome home. They spoke not of the probable pain and suffering which might far more than counterbalance the few pleasures that she could enjoy. Uncle John tried to shut out the thought of these from her mind, and she preserved, with regard to them, a silence, which he did not know whether to attribute to childish forgetfulness or to a regard for his wishes. Then there was a pause in the conversation. Talking of going home had taken them back in imagination, and their hearts and thoughts were busy there, while they both were silent. At last, after a long time, Agnes spoke:

"Uncle John, does not this voyage remind you of that other one, a long time ago, when you had your child-angel with you?"

"Yes, my daughter: I have been upon the ocean a great many times since, and never without thinking much of her; but this voyage has reminded me of her more than any other, because now, as then, I have a little girl to keep me company. This, however, is much pleasanter to me than that, Agnes."

"Why, how can that be, Uncle John? I did not know that anything in the world could give you so much pleasure now as you had then, when she was your little friend and companion."

"It was very pleasant to have her as such, Agnes; but I told you long ago that I was a very unhappy man then. I was morose, and sullen, and bitter."

"But, Uncle John, you said that you began to grow better from being with her, and I should think that it would be so pleasant to feel yourself getting better every day."

"Yes, Agnes, so it is, but not half so pleasant as to look back a long, long time and see the great change that has come over you. It was very little better that I grew day by day, so little that I scarcely felt it then; but now I see and feel that I am a very different man from what I was then. Now I am neither sullen

nor bitter. I like to see others happy, and I particularly like to help to make them so. It is only when I look back and see the great difference between my character and temper now and what it was then, that I realize how much I owe to that little child."

"Uncle John," said Agnes, hesitatingly, "may I say something to you? I am almost afraid, but——"

"Say what you please, Agnes. Don't you know we have agreed that you are to talk to me just as you do to your mother? So speak out, my daughter; don't be afraid."

"Uncle John," she answered, timidly, "I have heard you say a great many times that you were so grateful to that little girl, but never once that you were grateful to any person else. If I ever get my sight, I shall be very thankful to the good doctor who opens my eyes, very grateful to my dear Uncle John who took me to him, but a great deal more grateful to God than to both."

Uncle John was touched, and he felt glad that she could not see the tear-moistened eye with which he listened to her reproof. Agnes continued:

"Mother says that when anybody does me a favor I must never forget to thank them for it; that I must not only feel it in my heart, but I must say so. Now, Uncle John, when God gives us some great blessing, don't you think it must seem very strange to Him that we do not tell Him that we thank Him, and sometimes do not even seem to know that He gave it?"

Uncle John did not reply, but he felt her words. It was an oft-repeated truth, uttered in language as simple as childhood could frame, but it touched his heart as it never had done before. Agnes waited a few moments, and then said, distressed:

"You are angry, Uncle John; I ought not to have said it."

"No, my little daughter," he answered; "you cannot offend me, least of all by saying what you have done now. You are right, my child, you are right!"

Presently Agnes said:

"Uncle John, you don't think that I meant that you must not thank the little girl at all, do you? I did not mean that. I only meant that you must thank the child-angel for making you a better man, and you must thank God for giving you the child-angel. That is the way."

"I understand you perfectly, my daughter," he replied, smiling at her explanation; "and I not only understand you, but I promise to remember what you have said. I thank you, my daughter, for that good little sermon."

"Oh, Uncle John, don't call it a sermon. It would be very impertinent for me to preach a sermon to you. I was only telling you what I would like for you to do."

"Never mind, my child; you told me what was right, and I thank you for it."

That night, when he thought she was asleep, he softly opened her state-room door to see, as he always did, that she was comfortable. Agnes was upon her knees, and Uncle John heard the last words of her prayer: "Make my dear Uncle John grateful in his heart, and make him tell Thee so." He gently closed the door and went on deck. He avoided the many who were walking up and down for their accustomed exercise, and went to the forward deck, where he saw the moody stranger in his usual place. Uncle John lit his cigar, and drawing his shawl tightly around him, walked hurriedly backward and forward. His thoughts were busy; first with Agnes and her simple and earnest reproof, then with her prayer, and then with the result of that experiment which he so much dreaded and yet so much desired to make; and then, by an easy transition, they sped homeward, and dwelt upon the friends that he had left behind. Uncle John felt lonely, and had felt so ever since he left home, and every day that bore him farther from it increased the feeling. He devoted himself unceasingly to Agnes, and when she was awake he never left her. Nothing could tempt him to forget for a moment his pledge to her mother, and the promise that he had made to himself with regard to her. Before he left home he had believed that he loved Agnes better than anybody in the world. Ever since the evening that he had found the little blind musician in the church, he had had for her a tender feeling that he had for no other child. From that moment she had, as it were, grown up day by day under his eye and care, and independent of the sympathy that he felt for her, he loved her for herself. He saw her every day; to do something for Agnes's amusement or comfort had become a part of his daily duty, and she seemed to be ever in his thoughts. He never felt lonely when she was with him, and had thought that whatever might be the privations and inconveniences of his present journey, he, at least, would never be lonely, for he would always have Agnes. But he had not found it so. He was more constantly with her than he had ever been in his life before, and yet he was conscious that there was a void in his heart, which she, dear as she was to him, could not fill. He did not make this discovery to-night for the first time. He had pondered his strange feelings ever since he left home, and the conviction had gradually forced itself upon him that there was another dearer to him even than Agnes. He loved her indeed for her own sake, but he loved her also for the sake of another; he loved to make her happy, but the pleasure was greatly increased by the sight of the happiness that through her he gave another. Uncle John walked up

and down, trying honestly to search out and understand his own feelings.

"And can it indeed be true," he said to himself, "that this heart of mine, old as it is now, can feel again the passion that wrecked its happiness in its early youth? Is it true that the fierceness of that blighted love left embers enough to rekindle the flame even after so many years? Can it be that the deep, aching void in my heart now, the quiet, intense longing, can be the same passion which, in my boyhood, leaped like molten fire through my veins or lashed my soul into a tempest? Does age, indeed, make such a difference? My heart is not dead; it feels now as undeniably as it ever did, but its feelings no longer waste and desolate it as they did before. The old man's heart is toned down and subdued, but does it follow that it is therefore worthless? May it not be that the damps of sorrow and disappointment, softening down the fervor of youthful impulse and fiery energy, may, like the lapse of centuries upon the painter's masterpiece, subdue the colors and soften the outlines, and so enhance both its beauty and value? But even if my heart is not worthless; if it is yet capable of an affection which might satisfy the demands of a woman's heart, is it worth offering to such a woman as Grace?"

Uncle John puffed away at the stump of his cigar until it burned his lip; and then, dashing it far out into the sea, said to himself:

"I can but try. It may be that she will not reject an old man's love. Poor Grace! She has had so much trouble in her life that I would deem it a privilege and a pleasure to do what an old man could to make her happy during the rest of it! I will write to her to-night a frank, honest confession, and if my letter does no other good, it will at least be a temporary relief to me."

He went below, and on his way he again passed the stranger, who was still sitting there looking out upon the black and gloomy waters.

When he had finished his letter, he looked again into Agnes's state-room. This time she was fast asleep. Uncle John gazed at her a moment, and then left her to her peaceful slumber and dreams of home.

The next morning, when they were again upon the deck, Uncle John took his letter from his pocket, read it over again, and with a sigh of mingled dissatisfaction and disappointment, began to tear it slowly in pieces.

"What is it that you are tearing, Uncle John?" asked Agnes.

"Only a worthless piece of paper, daughter."

"Are you sad this morning, Uncle John? You do not talk much, and I am afraid that something troubles you."

"No, child," he answered; and resolving that if he was, the shadow should not be cast upon her spirits, he said, cheerfully:

"What shall we talk about, now—home, or Paris, or Switzerland, or what?"

"First, Uncle John, about your child-angel."

"What more can I tell you, Agnes, about her? I thought that you already knew all about her."

"No, you have never even told me her name."

"And strange to say, my daughter, I do not even know it myself."

"Why, how could that be, when you were with her for so long a time?"

"Everybody called her Lily; and the name suited her so well, that I was satisfied with it, and asked no other."

"You have never yet played the flute for me, Uncle John. I would like so much to hear the music that you used to play for her."

"Well, my daughter, I have only been waiting for you to express a wish to hear it. The flute is ready, and so am I, whenever you are."

"I am ready now, Uncle John."

"Then, Agnes, I must go below to my state-room to get it, and you must sit here quietly while I am gone. You must not move, for the deck of the ship is not like your mother's house, where you can safely grope your way along. You could not walk alone here ten steps without a severe fall."

"Yes, sir, I will sit perfectly still."

Uncle John walked slowly down the deck, and just before he reached the wheelhouse, he went to the side of the ship and looked out upon the sea. One by one, he dropped the fragments of the torn letter, and watched them sadly as they were drawn in the current under the revolving wheels.

"It is easy enough," he thought, "to destroy this expression of my feelings; but the feelings themselves are already too strong to be so easily controlled. My youth was blighted by a betrayed affection, perhaps my old age may be doomed to a second disappointment; let me in time guard against the same bitter consequences. Let me be saddened, if need be, but not embittered."

For the first time since he left home, Uncle John had momentarily forgotten Agnes. He was roused from his reverie by a step upon the deck, and looking up, he saw the stranger approaching the place that he had just left at her side. His first impulse was to go back immediately, and thus put an end at once to the interview; for Uncle John had an unaccountable

repugnance to the thought of Agnes coming into contact with this man. He probably could not himself have told what it was that he dreaded; but he had an instinctive feeling that it was defilement approaching purity. He had taken a step or two backward, when a sudden thought arrested him. In an instant the past loomed up before him with singular vividness. He remembered himself once like that stranger, a lonely voyager upon the ocean, surrounded by his fellows, but sad, gloomy, solitary. He remembered how he too used to sit day after day gazing upon the restless sea, fit emblem of his own restless heart, and that his first companion had been a child, his first pleasure a child's conversation. It was not in Uncle John's kind heart to deny to this stranger the same comfort.

"He looks like a bad man," he thought; "but he may not be so. Others might have thought the same of me; for bitter grief sometimes seams the brow and clouds the face, almost like guilt."

So Uncle John left the stranger to an uninterrupted conversation with Agnes. He got his flute, and returning, sat down upon the afterdeck, where he could see Agnes and her companion, so that he might return to her as soon as she should again be left alone.

As the stranger approached, Agnes knew that it was an unfamiliar step, and he saw her shrink from the voice, that was harsh, although the words were kind.

"My little girl, are you blind?"

"Yes, sir, entirely blind."

"Where is your home?"

"In Virginia, sir."

"And where are you going?"

"Uncle John is going to take me to Paris, to see if a physician there cannot give me sight."

"What is the name of the old gentleman who is with you?"

"Uncle John."

"Yes, that is his Christian name; what is his other name?"

"I do not know any other name, sir. Mother, and Mr. Cameron, and Mr. Derby, and all his friends call him Uncle John."

He was silent a moment, and then asked:

"And who are Mr. Cameron and Mr. Derby?"

"My mother's best friends, sir. Mr. Derby is the minister in Hopedale, and Mr. Cameron lives in the country, and his home, mother says, is a sweet, beautiful-looking place. I go there very often, and Miss Julia and Eva are very kind to me."

"Julia and Eva," he repeated; "are these Mr. Cameron's daughters?"

"Yes, sir, the only daughters that he has."

"Has he any sons?"

"Yes, sir, one, Mr. Walter; but I do not know him so well as the young ladies. He is almost all the time away from home at the university."

"Has Mr. Cameron only one son?"

"That is all, sir."

"What kind of a house does he live in? But I forgot! you have never seen it."

"But I know all about it, if I have not. I know every room in it so well, that I can find my way about almost as well as if I had eyes. It is the same one that his grandfather lived in, a large brick house with a gallery all around, both up stairs and down stairs. The windows are down to the floor and open upon the gallery. Miss Julia and Eva say that they are too narrow, and that the panes of glass are too small; but their father is not willing to alter them, because he wants the old house to look just as it did when he was a boy. The young ladies may be right, and the windows may be too narrow to look well: I don't know anything about that; but I do know what a pleasant, comfortable home it is, and how kind Mr. Cameron and his daughters are to me. I ought to love them very much, for they have done a great deal to make me happy. But why do you ask so many questions about Mr. Cameron; did you ever see him?"

"I am only asking you about your friends. You told me that he was one of your mother's best friends. I want to talk to you, my child," he added, kindly, "and so I naturally ask questions about those persons and places that most interest you."

"What makes you want to talk to me, sir?" she inquired. "I should think that there must be a great many people on the ship that you would rather talk to than a blind child. Uncle John stays with me all the time, but that is because he loves me and is sorry for me; but you are a stranger."

"Yes; but that does not prevent my being sorry for you too. I am a stranger to you, but I cannot help feeling interested in you, and I have often looked at you and wondered that you were so patient and cheerful. Does it not make you very sad to think that you cannot see any of the beautiful things in the world?"

"Sometimes it does for a little while; but I always try very hard not to feel so, because it is wicked and ungrateful."

"Wicked and ungrateful!" he repeated, bitterly. "I would like to know what a blind helpless child has to be grateful for!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Agnes, with a shudder, "please don't talk that way to me. If you do, I will not talk to you at all. I have a great deal to be grateful for: the best mother, and the best Uncle John in the world; the best friends, and a great big organ at home that I can play on all day if I like."

The stranger smiled as she mentioned her organ among her blessings.

"You play on the organ, then, as well as on the piano?"

"Yes, sir. I never play on the piano if I can get to the organ. It is the very best friend that a blind child could have. Everybody has something else to do besides talking to me, and listening to me; but my organ and I have nothing to do, and we never get tired of each other. Indeed, sir, my organ alone is a great blessing, and always in my prayers I thank God for it."

"You are a singular child!" he said. "I would almost be willing to change places with you for a little while, to see if in your condition I too could find anything to be grateful for; and then perhaps I should not despair of finding something, even in this life of mine, to awaken gratitude!"

"Haven't you anything to be thankful for?" she asked. "Have you no blessings at all?"

"None!" he answered, bitterly.

"No friends? no home? no love for music?"

"Certainly no home; I believe, no friends; and my love for music has never given me pleasure enough to call forth any gratitude on that score."

"Poor man!" said Agnes, in the simplicity of her compassion. "No home, no friends, no music! How much darker and sadder your life must be than mine, even though I am blind! How is it that you have no friends? Are they all dead?"

"Dead to me!" he answered.

The child's sympathy was awakened in its profoundest depths, and she said, earnestly:

"Then I will be your friend! I cannot do anything for you, but I can feel sorry for you, and can talk to you when you are lonely and want company."

The stranger was moved, and said in reply:

"I thank you, sincerely, my child, for your sympathy and offer of friendship, for I have long been unaccustomed to either. And since you have promised to be my friend, you must tell me your name."

"My name is Agnes Merton, but everybody calls me 'Agnes,' or 'little blind Agnes;' and what must I call you?"

"You must call me Mr. George. Agnes, there is something else that you can do for me besides talking to me."

"What is it, sir? I will do anything that I can."

"You can sing for me sometimes. I have listened to you already with pleasure, and have often wished to ask you to sing specially for me; but I was a stranger and had no right to do it."

"But we are friends, now, Mr. George, and you may ask it whenever you please, and I will always sing for you. Indeed, I cannot do anything else to give you pleasure, for, of course, you will not care to talk to a blind child."

"You are mistaken, Agnes; I shall like to talk to you very much. You shall tell me all about your home, your mother, your friends, Mr. Derby, and the Camerons; and you shall tell me too about your other friend, the organ. Do you play difficult organ music? you are almost too young for that, I should suppose."

"I do not know, sir," she answered, simply, "whether the music is difficult or not. I only play on the organ what I feel in my heart."

"It must be a great effort of memory for you to remember so many different pieces, and play them accurately. Does your mother play?"

"No, sir. When I was a very little child, before I could play for myself, she used to play for me on the piano, but she has never touched the organ in her life."

"Who, then, plays your music over for you until you learn it?"

"Who plays my music for me?" she repeated, in a perplexed tone. "I don't know what you mean, Mr. George."

"Why, of course, child, as you cannot see the notes yourself, somebody has to play the music for you, until you become so familiar with it that you can play it yourself."

"Oh, no sir! I don't play anybody's music except my own. I make it as I go along, and whatever my heart wants to say, I say it on the organ, just as I tell you now by words what I want to say."

"Oh! then you improvise altogether, Agnes, do you?"

"I don't know, sir, what you call it; I only know that is what I do. I would not love it half so well if I played the music that some other person's heart had made. No, sir; when I sit down to the organ, I talk to it; I don't repeat what somebody else has thought and felt."

"What a strange child you are! I shall find as much pleasure in talking to you, Agnes, as I shall in hearing you sing, and, whenever I can, I will come and do so. But I must go now, for I am afraid that your Uncle John is becoming impatient. He has been sitting at the other end of the ship ever since I have been talking to you, and is only waiting for me to go away so that he may come back to you."

He shook her by the hand and withdrew to his accustomed seat, and was soon, as usual, looking out at the ocean, seemingly unconscious of everything around him.

He had been mistaken, however, in thinking that at that moment Uncle John was awaiting his movements with impatience. He had determined not to interrupt his conversation with Agnes; but after waiting some time, he had concluded that the interview promised to be a long one, and was now busily engaged with a gentleman in the discussion of political affairs. He was interested and excited, and the stranger had left Agnes and walked away unnoticed.

The child was not accustomed to be left alone. She was in a strange place and afraid to move, and she felt desolate and lonely. Her only resource now was to sing, and her song, like her organ music, naturally expressed the feelings of her heart.

Uncle John was talking busily, when all at once, clear and distinct, the wind wafted her voice to him, and the touching words of the Blind Boy, "I'm blind! oh, I'm blind!" smote him to the heart. Turning round hastily, he saw that she was alone. He did not stay to finish his sentence, or to apologize to his companion for his abruptness, but sprang up and hastened to her. She greeted him with a smile as he seated himself by her, and she took possession of his hand as if to keep him there, but went on with her song. It soon reached other ears and other hearts besides Uncle John's. One after another of the passengers grouped themselves around her; and men, women, and children listened, until the words of the song verified themselves in their feelings, and "pleasure was turned into pain." The ever-recurring plaint, "I'm blind! oh, I'm blind!" appealed with touching pathos from the little blind songster to the hearts of her listeners, and there was scarcely a dry eye in the group around her. One there was, not with the rest, but apart by himself, who heard with folded arms and bowed head, and who wondered at himself that a child's song could bring tears to his eyes.

When it was ended, the group silently dispersed, and Uncle John and Agnes were again alone, and he said:

"I must ask forgiveness, my daughter, for having left you alone. Every word of your song reproached me."

"I am sorry for that, Uncle John, for indeed I did not mean it. I felt lonely and sad just then, and scarcely knew what I was doing when I began to sing. I should be very sorry for you to think that I meant to reproach you, for I am not so selfish as to expect or to want you to stay all the time with me."

"But, Agnes, I prefer to stay with you. I should not be contented or comfortable to leave you alone in a strange place, and I did not intend to do it then. I thought that the stranger was with you. How long had he been gone, when you began to sing?"

"Only a few minutes. He thought that you were impatient to come back, and was only waiting for him to go away."

"That was true; but while I was waiting I became engaged in conversation with a gentleman, and did not see when he left you. You must forgive my negligence this time; I promise that it shall not occur again. I have brought my flute; let us see if I have forgotten how to play."

Uncle John's tone had not the flexibility of former years, but it had not lost its sweetness; and as the clear strain was borne by the breeze far out upon the waters, where it gradually sank to rest, others besides Agnes listened with pleasure. The music, though sweet to all, was familiar only to himself, but it bore him far back into by-gone years, and with singular power linking the distant past with the present, blended both into one. Leaping over years and distance, his early love, his child-friend, Grace in her distant home, and the blind child at his side, all grouped themselves together in the same present picture. If Agnes could have seen his abstracted air, and the intense earnest gaze with which he seemed to look at something afar off, she might have thought herself forgotten again, and the lonely feeling might have returned; but she could see nothing of this; she only knew that Uncle John was sitting by her side, and that he was playing the flute for her pleasure, and she was contented and happy. After awhile he laid it down, and said:

"That will do for the present, Agnes. Tell me now what the stranger was talking about all that time."

Agnes told him the substance of their conversation, and her promise to be his friend.

"Did I do right, Uncle John?" she asked.

"Yes, my daughter, I suppose so."

"You are not certain, then, Uncle John. Now if you think that it is wrong for me to talk to this strange gentleman, I will not do it again."

"I cannot say so, Agnes. If it gives you pleasure, I shall not forbid it, for I am sure that I like for you to have as many friends as possible."

"I do not think, Uncle John, that it will give me a great deal of pleasure to talk to him, for his voice is harsh, and he has sometimes a cross, bitter way of speaking; but I heard you say that he has no companions, he says himself that he has no friends, and if it will be a comfort to him to talk to me, I think that I ought to be willing to do it. Uncle John, let me be his child-friend, as Lily was yours."

"You are right, my daughter: be the stranger's child-friend."

And so ever afterward Agnes welcomed the stranger kindly, and tried to be his companion and friend. He seemed quite satisfied with her society, for he sought no other, and Uncle John remarked that when he was talking to her, his face wore a different expression from its usual dark frown. He spent an hour or two every day with her, Uncle John surrendering to him his seat by her side, for the stranger did not care to talk to her in the presence of another. He questioned her closely about her home, her mother, her friends, and she answered him with the frankness of childhood. She told him all she knew, and felt glad that he was interested in them. She loved to talk of Hopedale and Cameron Hall, and the stranger encouraged her, perhaps because he saw the pleasure that it gave her. Thus they grew to be friends. Day after day, as she became more accustomed to him, his voice seemed to lose somewhat of its harshness, and his words somewhat of their bitterness. He always spoke gently and kindly to her, and never left her without thanking her for her friendship; and so the child experienced for the first time in her life the pleasure of giving pleasure to another.

When the steamer anchored at Cowes, the stranger left them, after a few words of affectionate farewell to his little blind friend, and an earnest wish that her journey might not be in vain, and her life always dark. When he was gone, she said, with tears in her eyes:

"Uncle John, I am so sorry that he is gone. I have nothing to do now."

"Nothing to do, my daughter! Have you not Uncle John to entertain and make happy?"

"No, sir," she answered, sadly. "You can make me happy, but I cannot make you so. I need you, but you do not need me. This stranger is the first person in the world that I ever could do anything for!"

"Don't you think, Agnes, that you can do anything for your mother or me?"

"No, sir; I wish I could. You and mother are always doing something for me, but I never can do anything for you. That is the hardest part of being blind."

"Your life is very far from useless, if you are blind. What would the cottage be without you? How much more lonely would my bachelor home be, if there were no little blind child to come in and gladden it? and how sorely would you be missed at the rectory and at Cameron Hall! It is not right, it is not grateful, for you to think that you are of no use to anybody. If you were peevish and discontented, then, indeed, you would cause your friends much sorrow; but as it is, the only regret that your

blindness causes them is on your own account. As for the rest of us, your life, blind as it is, makes ours brighter and pleasanter, and you ought to thank God that it is so."

"I do, I do, Uncle John," she replied, earnestly, "if it is really so; I only wish that I could see how it can be."

"And so," thought he, "might the silent sunbeam wish to know how it is that it dispels shadows, and lights up everything with its smile; but inasmuch as its very presence brightens and gladdens, it can never know the darkness and dreariness that it leaves behind when it is withdrawn."

Then he said, aloud:

"You are our sunbeam, Agnes, and you can never imagine how dark our hearts and lives would be without you. So, brighten up, and never let me hear any more about your being useless. Come, here is the old flute, I am going to play for you once more, and then put it away until we are again on the ocean going home. When you wake up in the morning, the steamer will be anchored at Havre, and then we will take the cars, and a few hours will bring us to Paris."

Agnes shuddered, but did not reply, and Uncle John knew what she was thinking of. He took up the flute and tried, by the music that she loved, to make her forget the suffering that she dreaded; and when he was done playing, he talked to her of Hopedale and the past, instead of Paris and the future.

CHAPTER XII.

AGNES enjoyed Paris; it was strange that a blind child should, but she had a patient and unselfish guardian, whose only pleasure was to see her happy, and who spared no pains to make her so. He tried faithfully to fulfill his promise, and make his eyes do double duty; but he soon found how impossible it was to give her any idea of that gay and ever-shifting scene. And in a place where so much is to be seen, and where the eye alone is the medium of so much pleasure, he seemed to realize, as he never did before, the extent of her affliction. They had pleasant rooms in the Rue de Rivoli, opposite the palace gardens, and when Uncle John looked from his window upon the bright scene, he remembered sadly that for those blind eyes there was no pleasant picture, but that the veil of darkness was as thick and impenetrable in the gay capital, where she so much needed eyes, as it ever

had been in the quiet village home, where there was nothing to interest or amuse.

The crowded thoroughfares of the Rivoli and the Boulevards afforded no safety and offered no attraction to the blind child; but every day, when the sun grew warm, Uncle John led her into the palace gardens, and seating themselves beneath the trees, he tried to entertain her with descriptions of what was around them. It was too early for the flowers to bloom, or the fountains to play, or for the bands of music, but there would have been enough to entertain her if she had not been blind; and as Uncle John's eye wandered round, and he felt how vain would be the effort to paint the scene upon her mind by words, he realized what blindness was, and longed for those eyes to be opened there. He felt doubly anxious that their first sight of the beauties of the world might be in a place where the Eye seems to be the deity universally worshiped; where science and art and nature and taste are combined, to group together in endless variety everything that the imagination can conceive, or the ingenuity of man devise, to gratify the eye. And then, as he sat there with Agnes at his side, Uncle John would fall into a day-dream. The operation had been successfully performed; the pain and suffering were all over; the childish heart was brimful of ecstasy at the sight of wonders and beauties of which she had never conceived; and then, she was at home, and he was looking with pleasure unutterable upon the mother's face, beaming with gratitude too profound for words!

Ah, Uncle John! you have thought that years and gray hairs had made you old, too old for day-dreams and castles in the air, and for feelings that you had laid aside years ago, as belonging entirely to that youth now long past; but you find yourself mistaken, as, with a start, you are awakened from your dream by the childish voice, which says: "Tell me something else that you see, Uncle John!" and with a sigh you look upon the eyes still blind, and with a pang you think of uncertainty and suffering yet to come.

The positions of Uncle John and Agnes seemed now reversed. Hers was all the pleasure; his the anxiety and pain. Her face was always bright, while his had lost its serene expression, and was anxious and careworn. The suspense to which he condemned himself was painful, but he had determined that she should enjoy all that she was capable of, before her doom was sealed either to a life of darkness or to the protracted suffering which she must endure. So he had not yet seen the surgeon, although they had been more than a week in Paris, and she seemed almost to have forgotten for what purpose she had come.

Every day they drove out to the Bois de Boulogne, and wherever else they went in that spacious park, they never returned without going to the cascade, whose glittering waters and sparkling foam and mossy rocks she could not see, but whose spray she loved to feel upon her face, and to whose music she was never tired of listening. Every day gay parties of pleasure stopped at the same place, and bright eyes took in all its beauty, but the water-fall spoke to no heart as it did to that of the blind child, and she, who had but the one inferior sense with which to appreciate it, lingered there day after day, listening to its splashing waters, long after the others had looked at and forgotten it.

But the music of Paris was Agnes's chief delight. Even already she had been two or three times to the French or Italian opera, and not one of all the vast assemblage enjoyed it as she did. The stage decorations, the scenic effect, the blaze of light, the magnificent dresses of the audience, the royal box with its royal occupants,—all these were great attractions to others; but she sat there in her blindness, with none of all this to distract her attention. With her soul wide awake, and drinking in with thirsty eagerness the music that she loved better than anything else on earth, she sat with folded hands and radiant face, the very embodiment of happiness; and Uncle John saw nothing there so beautiful as her countenance, and, lover of music as he was, he heard nothing that gave him such pleasure as the half-suppressed but earnest exclamation of delight with which her heart now and then lightened its burden of enjoyment. On Sundays she went to the churches of St. Roch, St. Eustache, and others, where they have the finest music; and so in all that brilliant capital there was not a lighter or happier heart than that of the child, who never failed to elicit an expression of sympathy or pity wherever she went, but was, in her enjoyment, altogether unconscious of needing either.

Uncle John wrote home regularly by every steamer. The subject of the letter, whose fragments he had buried in the ocean, had never been renewed. He himself could perhaps scarcely have told why he was so dissatisfied with it, and why he had destroyed it; he only knew that it did not express all that he felt, and he had determined to wait until his return home to speak what he found it impossible to write. The consequence was that, whenever he began a letter to her, a feeling of constraint came over him, and was very evident even to himself in the letter, but while he greatly deplored it he could not prevent it. To Julia and Eva, he wrote with that freedom and unreserve which had ever marked their intercourse; but to Grace he could not, and his letters to her were generally brief, and occupied entirely with Agnes.

He had made a few vain attempts to find the whereabouts of Charles Beaufort, and in this alone he felt that his close confinement with Agnes was a restraint upon his movements. He had sent notes to him to several different addresses, and had received no response, and but for her he would now have searched for him at the different medical schools and hospitals; but he could neither take her upon such a search, nor leave her at home while he went, so that he had almost relinquished the hope of seeing him at all. Uncle John not only wanted a companion, a friend, but he felt that in Charles he might also find a valuable assistant in his impending trouble. He began almost to shrink from the undertaking, and the nearer the time approached, the more heavily the responsibility weighed upon him, and the more he felt his incompetency to meet it. The suspense, too, was now becoming intolerable, and, determined to have her fate decided at once, he said to her one day, in a cheerful tone:

"Daughter, it is almost time to look up our surgeon; don't you think so?"

The smile was gone in an instant, and the plea for delay was already upon her lips, but she checked herself, and replied with a shudder:

"Yes, sir; I am ready."

For an instant he would gladly have recalled the proposal, for there was something very painful to him in the contrast between her unconcealed dread and her words of patient submission; but he knew that it must be the same thing, however long postponed, and he thought the sooner it was over the better it would be for both.

"Suppose," he said, "that I write a note to him to-day, and ask him to appoint a time for you to go to his office; are you willing? If not, I will wait until you are."

"Yes, Uncle John, I am willing; I am ready."

The unresisting tone in which she said "I am ready," smote him to the heart, and wishing, if possible, to divert her thoughts, he said:

"Come, let us go into the garden where the children are playing; you will feel better then."

She did not answer to this proposition as she always did, with a ready assent and a cheerful smile. She said not a word; but as Uncle John was tying on her hat, the tears began to roll down, one by one, and she brushed them away as they fell; but soon they flowed faster, and finally, with a deep sob, she sank upon the floor by his side, and, burying her face in her hands, cried as if her heart would break. Uncle John knew not what to do; the child needed her mother now, and none could supply her place.

He lifted her into his lap, and leaned her head against his shoulder, but he could not comfort her, and so he said nothing, but only looked at her in silent compassion. After a while she stopped crying, and wiping her eyes, said, with an effort to smile:

"I feel better now, Uncle John; let us go."

He led her through the less frequented parts of the garden until she was tired walking, and then they went to the place where the children were playing.

Their voices were as merry as usual, and Uncle John tried harder than ever to interest Agnes by describing what was going on around her, but it was a miserable failure. His heart was not in his descriptions, and he saw that she listened with an effort. Instead of the happy childish faces and frolicsome glee around him, he only saw the tear-stained cheeks at his side, and only thought of his inability to cheer and comfort his little blind companion. They did not stay very long, and she was the first to propose to go home. She went to bed much earlier that night than usual, and Uncle John drew a sigh of relief as he saw her locked in the blessed forgetfulness of sleep.

He then wrote to the surgeon, begging a prompt reply and an early appointment, and as a last resort he wrote another note to Charles Beaufort. This he sent through the *Poste Restante*, and as he sealed it he said to himself:

"This is my last hope. If this does not bring him, I will give up my search."

Galignani's Messenger was lying upon his table, but Uncle John could not read. Even the column upon the impending crisis in America could not fix his attention, and lighting his cigar, he folded his arms, and leaning back in his arm-chair, yielded himself up to something between a reverie and a dream. He was sure that he was not asleep, and yet the strange medley about Grace and Cameron Hall, and Agnes and the doctor, and Charles Beaufort and the dark-looking stranger on the steamer, and Hopedale and Paris, could not be the musings of a man thoroughly awake. From this dreamy state he was aroused by an altercation in which he distinctly heard his own name; and finally, when he was thoroughly awake, he distinguished the voice of the *concierge*, calling to some one ascending the stairs:

"*Plus haut, Monsieur! plus haut! Première étage, au gauche!*"

Uncle John now rose, crushed the white ashes from his cigar, and opened his door just as the stranger reached the landing and stood hesitating at which door to knock. The light from the lamp fell upon a lithe, active figure, rather tall, with a bright, cheerful face and a head of curling brown hair, and Uncle John exclaimed involuntarily:

"William Beaufort!"

"Not quite, Uncle John," he answered, grasping his hand.
"William Beaufort's son."

He followed Uncle John into the room, who stood looking thoughtfully at him for a moment, and then said:

"The same, the very same! William Beaufort over again! Welcome, my dear boy, welcome!"

"I was afraid, sir, that I would not find you at home at this hour. Everybody in Paris is in the street at this time."

"I never go out, Charles."

"Never go out in Paris, sir! Well, what on earth did you come for?"

"Come here and I will show you."

He led the way into Agnes's room, and Charles followed. They went to the bedside, and the light from the lamp in Uncle John's hand streamed full upon her face.

Charles looked inquiringly at Uncle John, but receiving no answer, he said:

"Uncle John, I always understood from my father that you were an old bachelor."

"So I am," he answered, smiling.

"Well, what does it mean?" asked Charles.

Just then Agnes stirred, and Uncle John whispered:

"Come out, we must not awaken her."

"Anybody might know, Uncle John," he said, laughing, as he closed the door after him, "that you are an old bachelor, and had never been accustomed to children; the idea of holding a lamp with the blaze streaming into a child's eyes and not expect to awaken her!"

"Ah, my dear boy!" he replied, sadly shaking his head, "would to God it were so! She is blind, Charles, totally blind, and this is my mission to Paris. Sit down, and let me tell you all about it."

Uncle John told the whole story, from the beginning of his acquaintance with Agnes in the twilight darkness of the village church, up to the time when she had gone to bed two hours before with the tears upon her cheeks and a heavy heart in view of her approaching suffering. When he had finished, he said:

"You do not wonder now that I do not go out, do you? I have taken that helpless child away from her mother; I promised her to be faithful to the trust—and I will!"

"No, sir, I no longer wonder that I found you at home. Have you any well-grounded hope of success?"

"I have nothing on which to build any hope, and have come now to satisfy her mother and myself, and see if Delascelles can do anything for her."

"Delascelles !" exclaimed Charles. "If anybody in the world can help her, he is the man !"

"So I believe, Charles. He was at the head of his profession when I left here several years ago, and I knew him then to be not only a capable but also an honest man in his profession."

"Yes, sir, you are right. He will deal truly and frankly with you, and if he tells you that nothing can be done, you may rely upon it. When is he to see her?"

"I don't know. It is not more than an hour since I put my note to him in the letter-box. I requested an early appointment, for I am tired of this suspense. At the same time, Charles, I dropped a note to you, addressed to the *Poste Restante*, and determined if that did not bring you to give up the search."

"It would have brought me, sir, for I receive all my letters that way now; but it would not have reached me before to-morrow, and I am very glad that accident sent me to you to-night. But I have had a search for you."

"How so? I am in the very heart of the city, and I took special pains to write my address distinctly."

"Oh, sir, the fault was entirely in my own stupidity. But before I begin my story, let me ask you how did you know that I had ever lived in the Rue St. Florentin?"

"The last letter that you wrote me before I left home was dated there. I had scarcely any hope that you were still there, for I know that sojourners in Paris boarding-houses are generally birds of passage, but I did not know where to find you, and so I determined to try every possible place."

"It was very well that you did, as the result proved, although I removed from there two months ago."

"How, then, did you get my note?"

"I went this evening to call upon my landlady. She is the only one of all that I have lived with for whom I have any regard; for she is a warm hearted, honest woman, whose soul does not wear the impress of a franc. We are quite good friends, and I only left her house because it is so far from the hospitals, and every week or so I call in to exchange a few kind words with her. She gave me your note this evening, saying that it had been there several days. I hurried off to find you, and putting the note into my pocket, went in at 270 Rue de Rivoli and demanded your name of the *concierge*. He shook his head, and declared that there was no such resident in that house. But I have lived here long enough to be pretty well acquainted with that profession, and his assurances that you were not there failed to convince me; so I took the book and looked at the names myself, but yours was not there. I turned away disappointed, and was sauntering slowly

down the street, wondering if I should ever find you, and thinking how tantalizing it was to know that I had a friend somewhere in Paris, and yet that he might just as well be across the ocean, when I thought of looking at your note again. Then I found that I had mistaken the number, and with a blessing on my stupidity I hastened here. The *concierge* immediately recognized your name, and directed me to your apartment; but, mistaking, as I always do, the *entre-sol* for the first floor, I was battering away furiously at the door of a room that it seems had no occupant, when he screamed at me from below, and cursing 'the stupid Englishman,' made me understand that I must go up another flight of steps. Accordingly, I mounted, and when I reached the landing I could not find the bell, and was hesitating at which one of three doors to knock, and, in view of my many difficulties, was muttering: '*per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum,*' etc., when the door opened and revealed you."

"And glad am I, my dear boy, that, after all your '*varios casus,*' you have at last made your way to me. I am lonely, Charles, very lonely, especially at this hour. I get along well enough during the day, for Agnes occupies my thoughts and attention; but at night, when she is asleep, I cannot go out and leave her, and so I spend some very solitary hours. She has been several times to the opera, but hereafter I shall be obliged to take her less frequently, for she is delicate, and the late hours and the excitement of so much music are not good for her."

"Nor will such close confinement be good for you, Uncle John. Could you not find some middle-aged French woman with whom you would be willing to trust Agnes sometimes?"

"No, I cannot punish her so much as that. She is afraid of strangers and foreigners, and besides, I promised her mother to take care of her, and I prefer to do it myself."

The conversation then turned upon the family at the Hall, and Charles inquired about his friends, with interest, but, as Julia had predicted, he spoke of them all together. Uncle John gave him Eva's message, to which he replied:

"I am much obliged for her kind remembrance of me. I spent many pleasant hours with her, for she was a gay, light-hearted child, full of enterprise and energy, with a perfect passion for exploring, and she and I have had some rare expeditions over the hills and through the woods."

"Child, indeed!" answered Uncle John, laughing. "I must give you to understand, sir, that she is now bearing the dignity, and entitled to the respect due to full sixteen years!"

"I beg her pardon, Uncle John! and yet I greatly fear that I will be long in learning to consider her a young lady; for

unless I am greatly mistaken, there is a child-like simplicity in her character that will outlive her childhood many years."

"You are right, Charles; and I have never known any one who can better afford to wear, for a long time, the graces of childhood."

"Yes, sir: her impulse and ardor and childish *abandon* in her enjoyment of life are very attractive, and she will most probably win much more admiration from the world than her quiet sister."

"There is scarcely a doubt of that, Charles; and yet Julia has more depth and strength of character than half-a-dozen such children as Eva,—not," he added hastily, "that I would detract anything from Eva, for the child is very dear to me, and is the light and sparkle of the Hall, but Julia is its strength and support."

"So I should imagine," he replied, thoughtfully. "Even in those few weeks, with all her reserve and timidity, I discovered the strength and solidity of her character."

"And she has energy, too," said Uncle John; "an energy that quietly but certainly surmounts difficulties."

Charles did not reply, and there was a pause, which Uncle John broke by saying, abruptly:

"You must go home with us, my boy, can't you?"

"That depends upon when you are going."

"I shall return in September or October, if it is possible."

"Then, Uncle John, I am sorry to say that I cannot go with you. I hope to get home in time to eat my Christmas dinner, but not before."

"Christmas dinner! I thought that your term of absence would expire long before that."

"So it would have done, if I had not spent those three months in Italy, away from my studies. I must stay now to atone for that lost time; otherwise I should be just ready to return with you. I wish that I could go, for I am tired of my life here, and anxious enough to get home once more."

"Then, since you cannot gratify me in this, perhaps you can in something else. Can we not arrange matters so that we may be together while I stay in Paris?"

"I should like nothing better. As we are situated at present we can see but little of each other, for my rooms are quite a distance from here, across the river, in the Faubourg St. Germain. It is possible, however, that you may find it necessary to remove there yourself, as you will then be near the office and residence of Delascelles."

"Well, if he thinks it advisable, I will remove there, in order

to be near him, but I have a great objection to taking Agnes into that quarter of the city. Its narrow streets and confined air must render it unhealthy, and she will lose, besides, the advantage of being near the Palace Gardens, where she can walk without danger from carriages and omnibuses. I should particularly dislike to change my location, on her account."

"I shall await your decision, Uncle John, and make my arrangements accordingly, for I am resolved to be with you, even at the expense of inconvenience. If I live in this part of the city, it will make my walk every day much longer, but perhaps that will not, after all, be objectionable. So if you decide to remain here, and your landlady can accommodate me, I will take my lodgings here also; and if not, I will find a place as near you as possible."

"The landlady will most certainly accommodate you, my boy," answered Uncle John, smiling, "since I represent that personage myself. I never could have even a temporary home where William Beaufort's son could not be accommodated."

"You don't really mean, Uncle John, that you have rented the whole apartment, and have gone regularly to housekeeping?"

"I really mean that I have rented the apartment; as to my housekeeping, that is neither very elaborate nor very troublesome. I have hired a valet, who does a little of everything; among the rest, brings our three meals a day from a neighboring restaurant. A woman from the apartment above, comes every morning and night to attend to Agnes, and act as chambermaid, and so we live very quietly and comfortably. We have our meals when we please, and order what we please, are not restricted and fettered by boarding-house rules, and, above all, Agnes is alone with me, and perfectly at her ease and at home. She shrinks from foreigners, and it is positively amusing to see how closely she nestles up to me as soon as she hears a French word. She was extremely averse to her chambermaid at first, but the woman is kind, so that now she begins to tolerate her."

"I sincerely hope, sir, that Delascelles will advise you to remain where you are, for, indeed, I like this arrangement exceedingly. I have been tossed about so much, and subjected so long to the whims and caprices of 'my landlady,' that it will be a real pleasure to be at home with Uncle John."

"I am afraid, Charles, that you will have but little of the home-feeling, for, in my long experience of Paris life, I have never found it here, and least of all will you probably find it in my desultory, bachelor style of housekeeping. However, it will be pleasant for us to be together, and a great relief to me to

have you with me. I hope that Delascelles will see her at once and decide what is to be done, for her sake more than for my own, for her mind now dwells upon it so constantly that she is wretched."

"Poor child!" exclaimed Charles. "I only hope that the pain and suffering will not be in vain. I would like, Uncle John, to be useful to you, but if she is so averse to strangers, I am afraid that she will not allow me to relieve you much."

"Your society and presence at such a time, my son, will alone be invaluable, and will relieve me of much anxiety and responsibility. I am growing restless under the delay, and heartily wish that the whole thing were over and her fate decided one way or the other!"

"I must bid you good-night, now, Uncle John," said Charles, rising to go, "for it will be midnight long before I get home, and I shall receive a blessing from my grumbling, growling old *conciergerie*, as he opens the door. There are three or four of us young fellows in the house, not very regular in our hours, and every night some one or other of us comes in after midnight, thus arousing his wrath and bringing down a volley of curses upon 'the stupid, execrable English,' who, unfortunately, have to bear the sins of all who speak their language."

The next morning Uncle John said:

"Agnes, I have a new friend for you."

"You are friend enough, Uncle John. I don't want any more until I get home."

"But I am sure that you will like this one. He is kind and good, and you will soon learn to love him very much."

"What is his name, Uncle John?"

"Dr. Charles Beaufort."

"Is he the one that I have heard Eva talk so much about?" she asked, brightening; "and did he write that long letter about Italy, that you and she liked so much?"

"Yes, Agnes, he is the same."

"Then I will like him," was her only reply.

The cloud was upon her face and upon her heart, and she could not be cheerful. Uncle John tried in vain to interest her, but when he found it impossible, he said:

"Come, my child, we must not sit here in the house this beautiful day. Where shall we go? to the garden, or to the cascade? or how would you like for me to take you to the Louvre, and tell you about some of the beautiful things there?"

"What is the Louvre, Uncle John?"

"It was, a long time ago, a royal palace, but now it is full of

pictures and statues and all kinds of curiosities. I like the beautiful pictures more than anything else."

"Oh, no, Uncle John, not there! It will make me feel so very blind! There is nothing in the Louvre for the blind!"

"That is true!" he answered, sadly. "Where will you go, then? to the garden?"

"I believe that I would rather hear the sound of the water-fall this morning than anything else."

They drove out to the cascade, and got out of the carriage, and Uncle John led her where she could feel the spray upon her cheeks, and she was soothed by the sound of the falling waters. They sat there for a long time, but she was not inclined to talk, and Uncle John left her to her own thoughts, although he well knew how sad they were. All that day she was languid and listless; her animation and brightness were all gone, and at night, worn out in mind and body, she went to bed early, and so missed seeing her new friend.

The first question that he asked, when he came, was:

"Have you heard from Delascelles?"

"Yes, I received a note this morning, appointing Thursday, at ten o'clock, for an examination."

"Does Agnes know it?"

"Not yet. She has been so much depressed all day that I could not make up my mind to tell her; but she must know it to-morrow. I have been greatly disappointed to-day in not getting letters. It is the first steamer since our arrival that has not brought us something. I think that the disappointment had something to do with Agnes's sadness."

"The steamer is behind time, Uncle John. Her arrival was telegraphed from Liverpool this afternoon, and her mail will be in to-morrow."

"The morrow brought the hoped-for letters, very welcome, but unable to make Agnes happy. Her mother wrote cheerfully and hopefully, and Uncle John trusted that the child did not detect the under-current of anxiety and dread, so evident to himself, beneath the surface of loving words and pleasant tidings. The day passed on quietly and heavily. Uncle John's resources for entertaining Agnes were all exhausted in vain; and when he stood beside her bed that night, and saw her asleep, with the tears upon her cheeks, he felt sincerely thankful that the morrow would end all this suspense.

Thursday morning, at the appointed hour, Uncle John, Charles Beaufort, and Agnes were rattling over the rough pavement of the Faubourg St. Germain. It was a silent ride, for the thoughts of all were too busy for words; and when the carriage stopped,

Agnes shuddered, and turned deadly pale, and Uncle John had almost to carry her up the long flight of steps to the surgeon's room.

He looked compassionately upon the frail little patient before him, with her sweet, gentle face, and her nervous clinging to her friend and protector. He spoke kindly to her, and tried to reassure her; but when he took her hand, he saw her shrink from his touch, although she neither complained nor resisted.

He looked long and earnestly into her eyes, and pausing once or twice, resumed his examination, as if determined that he would not yield to his first impression. Uncle John watched his face with painful anxiety, and when the surgeon turned and looked at him, and with a mournful, but decided shake of the head, more expressive than words, signified that the case was hopeless, he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands, and his bitter disappointment told him how strong had been his hope.

Not a word was spoken, and the silence became oppressive even to Agnes, who presently asked:

"Uncle John, what does the doctor think?"

With an effort, he replied, quietly, but with inexpressible sadness:

"He will not operate, my daughter; it is useless."

Her face for an instant beamed with its old expression, at the thought of release from the dreaded suffering; but the next moment it was clouded with a deeper gloom than Uncle John had ever seen upon it before. She was a child, and could not altogether realize how long and dreary would be the rayless night of all her future life; but child as she was, the thought of being always blind was full of profoundest sadness, and leaning her cheek upon her hand, she said, in a tone that smote the hearts of her listeners:

"Always blind! always blind! Uncle John, I feel more blind than ever now!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGER might have thought that the mother's life, at Hopedale, was quiet and monotonous in the extreme; but her friends knew well that it was one long and ever-increasing anxiety. As ever before, so now, also, she was patient and unobtrusive; she did not weary her friends with her trouble, or make unrea-

sonable demands upon their sympathy. Her duties were as faithfully performed as ever, but the all animating motive that had lightened her labor was withdrawn with Agnes. She had longed for the first letter, to tell her not only of dangers passed, and of their safe arrival at their destined haven, but also to bring her those words of sympathy and encouragement and kindness that she surely expected from her own and her child's best friend. The letter came; she read it again and again, and at last, with dissatisfaction and disappointment, she laid it down, and wondered why Uncle John should write to her so coldly and formally. It was singularly unlike him, for he was not accustomed to withhold sympathy even from strangers, when they needed it, and especially was it unlike all his former intercourse with her. The friendship of years, and the present peculiar circumstances, she thought, entitled her to more than an ordinary share of his interest and kind feeling, and when she painfully contrasted the letters that came to her, with those that Uncle John wrote to Julia and Eva, she was more perplexed than ever.

The life at Cameron Hall flowed on in its usual quiet channel, and there the regular letter from Uncle John was looked forward to with eager anticipation. They had no reason to complain of coldness or formality, for they found him in his letters the same warm-hearted Uncle John that he had ever been at home.

Eva's gayety of disposition and light heart remained unaltered. She could not be sobered or subdued even by the anxious cloud that now generally rested upon her father's face, and when she asked, as she often did: "What is the matter, papa? What makes you look so anxious?" and he replied: "I am watching the signs of the times, my daughter," she would answer with a merry laugh, and declare that she did not believe there would be any war at all; and if there should be, it would not be half so terrible as papa imagined.

Julia, on the other hand, grew more thoughtful every day. With her practical way of looking at things, she saw deeper than the tinsel of epaulets and the waving of banners, and although she really knew nothing of war except its name, still she had implicit confidence in her father's judgment, and felt assured that what he so much dreaded must be evil and only evil; and so the shadow of thoughtful anxiety sometimes rested upon her brow as well as upon his. She thought much upon a subject little calculated to engross the attention of a girl of her age. She never talked to Eva about it, for she well knew that from her child-sister she would only receive in reply a merry laugh or a pleasant jest; but she listened with thoughtful interest to the grave discussions of her father and Mr. Derby, who talked much of the

threatening aspect of affairs, and watched anxiously the clouding horizon.

It was the close of an April day, April only in its showers, for there had been no balminess or genial warmth in the fitful rains and the hazy, powerless sun; Eva was standing at the window, looking wearily out at the rain as it poured in the heaviest shower of the day. Suddenly, she exclaimed:

"Why, sister, who can that be coming in such a rain as this? I do believe it is Mr. Derby, and he is riding furiously."

"I should think he would be," replied Julia, quietly, as she joined her sister at the window. "He must be anxious to get out of such a pelting rain. Yes, it is Mr. Derby."

The sisters went down together to receive him, and met him at the door.

"Where is your father, girls?" he asked, hurriedly.

"He is riding over the plantation, Mr. Derby," answered Julia, "but will probably be in in a few minutes. The rain will drive him home."

He followed the girls into the library, but he was troubled and restless, and little inclined to talk. Presently Mr. Cameron came in, and as soon as Mr. Derby heard his step, he went out into the hall to meet him, and, when they returned to the library, they seated themselves in silence.

The girls looked anxiously at them, but said nothing; and after awhile Mr. Cameron said, very gravely:

"It has come sooner than I expected, Mr. Derby."

"What has come, papa?" exclaimed the curious Eva.

"War, my daughter, war!"

"War, papa!" exclaimed the astonished Julia. "Surely you do not mean that!"

"Yes, Julia, it is even so. Uncle John was right; we have reached the crisis with startling rapidity. I did hope that it might have been averted, at least until after my time."

"I have long been afraid, sir, that I would live to see it," answered Mr. Derby. "Public events have been drifting that way for years, and compromises, platforms, and all other expedients have seemed to me like trying to stem the torrent of Niagara by throwing sand into the rapids."

"Have no particulars been received of the surrender of Fort Sumter?" inquired Mr. Cameron.

"None at all, sir; we know nothing except the bare facts, now, but we will hear all in a day or two, through the newspapers."

There was a long, solemn pause: the crisis was upon the nation,

and it appalled alike the young and the old, the reflecting and the thoughtless. Eva's cheek rested upon her hand, and her whole attitude was expressive of a thoughtfulness very unusual for her. After awhile she said :

"Papa, I cannot see why taking possession of a single fort should necessarily be the beginning of war. If everybody in the country thinks like you do, that it is such a dreadful evil, the Northern people will let the Charlestonians have the fort rather than resent it at such a fearful cost. Besides, I don't understand what is meant by their taking it, for I should like to know if it does not already belong to them. If it is in their harbor and protects their city, they certainly must have a better right to it than anybody else."

Mr. Derby smiled, and her father answered :

"You are in happy ignorance, my child, of the jealousies of governments, and the machinations of politicians. If I could explain to you the causes of this war, which have been accumulating under my eyes for the last thirty years, each one would appear to your unsophisticated judgment to bear the same disproportion to the tremendous result, as does the taking of Fort Sumter by the Charlestonians to a long civil war."

"But, papa," asked Julia, "is there no hope, even now, of some adjustment or compromise? I have heard you say that many of the politicians who have most strongly urged secession thought that it could be peaceably effected; and may it not be that when they find themselves mistaken, and see the nation upon the very eve of war, they will be willing to compromise?"

"It is too late now. Politicians and fanatics sometimes set machinery in motion whose tremendous power defies their feeble attempts to stop it, and for that reason they ought to be very sure that the energies which they seek to arouse will work for good and not for evil. No, my daughter; the day of adjustment and compromise is over now. If this news be true, the war is already begun, and no power but Omnipotence can arrest it."

It was a gloomy evening at the Hall. The gentlemen talked of nothing but the terrible calamity that had come upon the nation, and the girls listened in silence and awe. For once, Eva was thoroughly awake and interested in political affairs, and as she listened, her heart was oppressed with undefined forebodings, and she feared and dreaded she scarcely knew what. When Mr. Derby left, there was a cloud upon that family circle which he had never seen before; and after he was gone, Mr. Cameron sat in silence, thinking gloomily upon the nation's doom. Eva's book

was lying in her lap with her finger between the leaves, but its pages no longer interested her; imaginary troubles and fictitious characters were altogether insignificant to one who might soon herself be a participator in scenes and sufferings before which the highest-wrought coloring of romance would pale and fade. She tried various expedients to drive away her thoughts and fears, and perhaps elsewhere she might have succeeded, for she was accustomed easily and quickly to shake off trouble; but as long as she saw her father and sister in their attitude of sad reflection, she could neither forget its cause nor resist its influence.

Julia, like her father, sat still and thought. She thought of what Uncle John had told her would be the duty of Southern women; of the privations, the anxieties, the sorrows, the bereavements that they would have to bear, and she wondered if she would have the strength and fortitude to do and to bear her part.

The days and weeks passed by, and the trumpet-call to arms sounded through the length and breadth of this once peaceful country, and marshaled into battle array the brethren of a once united nation. Fierce, vindictive, and flippant threats of "crushing the rebellion in sixty days," stirred the Northern people, and they flocked to the standard of the Stars and Stripes, determined to chastise into submission, by one severe blow, their recreant Southern brethren. Southern men, too, flocked to their standard, and mothers, wives, and sisters sent off with a blessing and a God-speed those they loved best on earth, hiding the heartache and the tears until the loved ones were out of sight. The demon of war was pre-eminent in the land, and in his blighting path all the arts of peace and prosperity were at once consumed. The whole nation was, by a sudden metamorphosis, transformed into an army. The bugle and the drum were heard instead of the busy, restless hum of the manufactory; the drill and the camp became at once familiar to those who before had been utter strangers to both; the plow-share was exchanged for the sword, and the pruning-hook for the spear, and war, only war, was thought of and talked of throughout the land. The old, whose experience had taught them somewhat of its horrors, saw, with agony, the upheaving nation; the young, full of the ardor and impulse belonging to their years, entered the ranks, buoyant with hope and reckless of danger; and while fathers encouraged their sons to go, they watched them with a pang as they left their homes so brave and joyous and full of life, and so unconscious of the weary march, the bleeding feet, the fainting thirst, the wasting fever, the bloody battle-field!

Mr. Cameron had promised to himself to keep his private decision in abeyance until the State had spoken ; but while Virginia still hesitated, he, among many other of her sons, became daily stronger in his conviction of what she ought to do, and trembled lest the fear of suffering should warp her judgment and determine her action.

Reluctant to sunder the ties which had been cemented by the blood of the best and noblest of her sons ; loth to pull down with her hand one single stone of that fabric whose foundation her own Washington had laid ; yet equally unwilling to surrender a single one of those rights which he himself had taught her to value more than life, the Old Dominion determined to make one more effort, and the last, to secure her rights as a Southern State in the Union. The delegation to Washington was a failure, for fanaticism ruled in the halls of justice, and despotism had usurped the throne of liberty. Then Virginia spoke out nobly and indignantly, and without a regret severed the tie that bound her to a government which had proved recreant to its trust and duty.

From the first, Walter Cameron had begged permission to enter the army, and Julia read with pride and pleasure his earnest appeals to his father. She wondered that her father could resist them, but she said not a word, for she felt that the responsibility rested not with her. Mr. Cameron felt for his native State such a degree of reverence that, although his convictions were now fixed, still he waited for the public formal act of secession by the State, before he threw himself, heart and soul, into the war. As soon, however, as this was done, he wrote to his son, not only giving his consent, but making a special request that he would join the army at once, and bidding him come home for that purpose. The delighted youth needed no urging, but obeyed the summons instantly. Julia welcomed him with a mingled feeling of pleasure, pride, and sadness ; and as she looked at the tall, athletic youth, so full of life and promise, she felt proud of the offering that she was about to make to her country, and yet trembled lest his blood too should be required. Not so with Eva. She had now become accustomed to the name and thought of war, and as yet had only seen its bright and glittering exterior. She and her sister frequently rode into town in the afternoon to see the company drill, and the bright faces, the fresh, new uniforms, and the stalwart forms full of health and strength appealed to her fancy, and she thought, with delight, of adding a brave, handsome soldier boy to its ranks. Besides, Walter was at home, and this alone was happiness enough for Eva. She thought not of the long separation, of the danger and hardship on his part, and the loneliness and anxiety on her own ; all

this she left for that future to which it belonged, and with all her heart and soul she now gave herself up to the enjoyment of her brother's society. Meanwhile, Julia, with a mother's forethought, provided for Walter everything necessary to his health and comfort in camp, and collected for him many little conveniences which, months afterward, when he was far away from home and family, brought a tear to the young soldier's eye as he recognized in them the proofs of her thoughtful love.

Neither Walter nor his father had any undue ambition, and both were quite willing that he should enter the ranks as a private, and rise as his services and merits demanded.

In all her conversations with him, Julia sought to impress him with the idea that he must enter the army and do his duty there from conscientious motives; she begged him to realize in the beginning that it was not pastime and adventure, lest when the novelty should wear off and privation begin, his spirit should fail and his energies relax; and she urged him to remember that so long as his country had need of him he was bound to serve her, and to keep firmly at his post, not asking a furlough until long service had entitled him to a respite, and he could be well spared.

The night before Walter's departure, a few minutes after he had gone to his room, he heard a gentle tap at the door. It was Julia, and she said, as he opened it:

"Come, Walter, just for a moment."

He followed her into her own room, where she unlocked an old-fashioned writing-desk and took out a small and much worn prayer-book. She put it in his hand, and said:

"Wear it, Walter, always about your person; it was our mother's, and God bless it to you, Walter dear!"

The next day a company of volunteers, comprising all the youthful promise of the town, departed from Hopedale, leaving in many a home-circle an empty chair, and hearts more empty still. Bright banners and martial music, the smiles of the young and fair, and beautiful bouquets, made outwardly a gay pageant; but in the crowd there were not wanting those who looked with apprehension a little way into the future and saw another procession, but, alas! how different!—with arms reversed, and wailing music, bringing some comrade back indeed to his home, but only to be laid away in that quiet resting-place whose silence the thunders of war can never break.

Walter Cameron cared nothing for the music, or the flowers, or the throng. With his cap pulled over his brow, his lips compressed, and his face rigid, he marched along mechanically, for his heart was at home with the sobbing Eva and the elder sister,

who had, with one stifled cry, and her eyes swimming in tears, strained him to her heart, bid him be faithful to his country, blessed him, and sent him away.

Very quiet and very sad was the next week at the Hall. In the agony of parting with her brother, Eva had first tasted the suffering of war. Hers was a warm, loving heart, and it clung tenaciously to Walter, her brother and companion. "Her soul was *knit* with his," and, in her sorrow, she was convinced that this, her first trial, was the hardest of all; that the war could bring her no sorer one than to give up Walter. It was not her habit to anticipate evil; she thought not of danger, wounds, or death; all that she thought of was the present separation, and even this, the first cloud that had ever darkened her life of sunshine, seemed intolerable. Her father and sister watched her in silence as she gave way to all the impetuosity of childish grief, and they only hoped and prayed that the war might bring to that bright young heart no severer discipline or more bitter experience than this, its first sorrow. Julia was outwardly the same. Not one of her duties was neglected or forgotten; the only difference was, that while generally this was her pleasure, now it was an effort; her heart and thoughts were evidently far away in a distant camp, with a soldier boy, for whom she felt a mother's rather than a sister's love.

Walter had been gone a week. They were lingering one morning at the breakfast-table after everything had been removed, the girls talking of their brother, and Mr. Cameron looking over the newspaper which the servant had just brought. Suddenly the girls were startled by a muttered ejaculation that sounded like a curse, and looking up in surprise and terror at something so unusual from their father, their dismay was not lessened when they saw his face. Julia sprang up and went to him, and asked trembling:

"What is it, father?"

"Disgrace! disgrace!" he answered, almost fiercely, and, dashing the paper down upon the table, he left the room.

Julia took it up, and was not long in finding the cause of her father's strange excitement, and with a groan she covered her face with her hands. By this time, Eva's suspense and astonishment had become intolerable, and she said, in a beseeching tone:

"Oh, sister, tell me, what is the matter?"

Julia silently pointed to the paragraph, and Eva read.

It was an extract from a Northern newspaper, a complimentary notice of Captain George Cameron, who, though himself a native Virginian, and his father an influential citizen of that State, and a warm secessionist, was, nevertheless, so conscientious

a patriot, and so loyal to the Union, that he had accepted a captain's commission in the Federal army.

Eva was astounded. She knew nothing of George that was good, but she knew that he was her father's son, and, therefore, she believed him incapable of such a deed. Dashing the paper down, she exclaimed indignantly:

"It is false, every word of it! George may not be good, but he is a Cameron, and a Cameron cannot be a traitor!"

Poor Julia groaned aloud. To her proud spirit and uncompromising principle this was, indeed, a heavy blow. She thought of her other brother's departure for the same war; of her loving words of advice; of his solemn promise to be faithful; and she remembered, too, the sad farewell; the heartache when he was gone; the fear lest he might never return. All this, however, seemed as nothing, as less than nothing, in comparison with this great trouble. Sorrow may be borne, but to a high, noble spirit, there is no agony like the sense of shame and dishonor.

Eva looked at her sister in surprise, for she had never seen her overpowered before. Her own grief had never before made her forgetful of the comfort of others, but now, when she went to her own room and locked herself in, forgetful of father, sister, household duties, and the whole world, Eva learned more from its effect upon her sister than from her own feelings, the extent of the calamity that had fallen upon their household. She herself had never regarded George as a brother. The idea of his bearing the same relationship to her as her darling Walter, had never occurred to her; and while her heart rebelled at the thought of a Cameron being a traitor, it was rather because he bore their name than because she felt bound to him by the ties of blood, or realized that his infamy could cast a shade upon the family name. Therefore it was that she could not enter wholly into her father's and sister's feelings. She only felt indignant, while they were mortified and wounded in their inmost soul.

Mr. Cameron received the blow in bitterness of spirit. He thought of the child who had marred the peace of the household by his turbulent and unruly spirit; of the son, whose undutiful conduct had broken his mother's heart; of the boy, who, in anger, had left his father and his home, and whose hard heart had not, even in the lapse of years, been sufficiently softened to send back to that father one word of regret or affection. He could not wonder that such a son should prove a traitor to his country; he could only regret in bitterness and sorrow that that son should be his own. He had dreaded war; he thought that he had enumerated its evils, and fortified his mind for its hardships; but among all its dire calamities he had not reckoned this, the direst

of them all. He had feared to lose Walter, his pride and hope, and yet he might, with a Spartan heart, have laid his son upon his country's altar; but to give one to his country's enemies; to see his own son's arm raised against the land that gave him birth, his own, his father's home,—no wonder that Mr. Cameron groaned in anguish of spirit whenever he thought of George!

The aspect of the hall was changed. Instead of its social atmosphere, there was silence, constraint. In bereavement, we love to hear the name of the lost one, and cannot feel that he is wholly gone so long as we can speak of him; but the trouble of the Cameron family admitted of no such solace. Each heart bore its sorrow in silence and loneliness, and George, though the burden of the thoughts of all, was a forbidden name. Even Mr. Derby, the friend and pastor, found himself, for the first time in his life, powerless to console, and his visits to the hall were neither the social ones of old nor the sympathizing ones that he would now have liked to make them.

A fortnight had now passed away, a long, dreary fortnight, which, to Eva especially, had seemed interminable. She had not been able to persuade her sister even to ride into town, for Julia seemed to shrink from observation, and Eva wondered if she intended hereafter to make a recluse of herself. They had not heard a word from Grace for several days, when, one morning, to their great surprise, she walked out to the Hall. In all the years of her residence in Hopedale she had never crossed the threshold of Cameron Hall until Agnes was gone. Their invitations had always been so gently, but persistently, refused, that they had long ago ceased to ask her; but one day, not long after Agnes had left, they found her so depressed and lonely that they once more invited her to go home with them, and were both pleased and surprised when she at once accepted the proposal. Since then they had frequently sent for her, and she had never refused to come. She seemed to feel that now, in Agnes's absence, she had a claim upon her friends which she did not have when the child was at home; and, either because she loved to be with those whom Agnes loved, or from some other unexplained reason, she was now always willing to go to Cameron Hall. She had, however, never before attempted to walk, and when Julia heard Eva exclaim: "Why, sister, there is Grace Merton coming up the lawn, and she is actually walking," she hurried to meet her, afraid that she might have bad news from Agnes, and assured that she must have had some powerful motive to induce her thus to come.

She was very tired and very sad, and when Julia asked about Agnes her eyes filled, and she silently gave her a letter. The first few lines told all. The doctor had pronounced Agnes hope-

lessly blind. The girls insisted that she should remain a day or two at the Hall, to which she consented, for she felt that there, if anywhere on earth, among her child's best friends, she might expect sympathy and kindness at such a time. Agnes's friends were disappointed as well as her mother; the result had proved how much hope they had all unconsciously built upon the experiment.

Grace could not be ignorant of what the newspapers had heralded, and what everybody was now talking about, and she well knew how Mr. Cameron and Julia would suffer under such a blow. Without a word or look that betrayed her knowledge, she contrived to make her presence and her company a comfort rather than a restraint, and when she went away they told her how much they should miss her, and she believed them. When Cameron Hall was gay and happy, and full of sunshine, she felt that her sad face and sadder heart were out of place there, but now they, too, had their trouble. Agnes's friends had need of her, and she was glad to be able to do something for those who had done so much for her child. From henceforth she was no stranger at Cameron Hall, and if, in their intimate intercourse with her, they saw that she was growing sadder every day, and that even her quiet smile was now seldom seen, they thought that separation from Agnes and disappointed hope sufficiently accounted for the change.

The next letter that came from Uncle John was to Eva, and in his letters to her he always mentioned her friend, Dr. Beaufort, and generally sent some message from him. He now spoke of his disappointment in not being able to persuade him to return home with him. Eva regretted it very much, but Julia heard it with quiet satisfaction. She sincerely hoped never to see him again, for she felt that there was now a wide interval between Charles Beaufort and the sister of George Cameron, the traitor.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNCLE JOHN and Charles Beaufort never alluded, in Agnes's presence, to their visit to the surgeon. They hoped that she would forget her disappointment, and soon regain her accustomed cheerfulness; but for days it was evident that she thought of nothing else, although she too was careful not to speak of it. It

was several nights afterward, when they thought she was asleep, that their conversation was interrupted by the plaintive voice, which sang, "I'm blind! oh, I'm blind!" and often in the day-time they heard her unconsciously singing the air without the words. She longed for home, her mother, and her organ, and she wanted these comforters now more than ever; but she did not tell Uncle John so. Her mother had said that she must wait patiently for him to decide upon the time of their return, and she did so. He had no intention of returning home at present. It was too early by two months to enjoy Switzerland, and in his vain efforts to interest and amuse Agnes he began to realize how wearily the time would henceforth drag on with her. It was now late in April, the weather was delicious, and the garden of the Tuileries wore its sweetest spring aspect. Groups of merry children sported and shouted amid its leafy shades, and as they flitted about in their gay, bright dresses, they looked like animated flowers. Nurses in their trim dresses and snowy muslin caps mingled in the throng, chatting gayly in French; here and there a turbaned zouave, in his picturesque costume, formed a striking feature in the scene; and quiet old women, sewing or knitting under the trees, looked up from their work with a dreamy glance at the frolicsome children around them, as if they wondered if they too ever could have been so young and so happy. But the garden with its pleasant air and cheerful sounds had lost its charm for Agnes. She did not refuse, when Uncle John proposed to go, but she did not assent with the cheerfulness that she used to do, nor did she enjoy it so much while she was there. Neither did she love the cascade as she had done. Agnes was home-sick; she wanted her mother; and Uncle John could see it, even if she did not say so. The music alone retained its power to charm, and this pleasure Uncle John allowed her to enjoy as much as possible.

The three were sitting together one Sunday night around their center-table, Uncle John and Charles talking of their plans, and Agnes apparently listening, but evidently thinking much more of a book that she had in her hand than she was of the conversation. She had traced its outlines with her fingers, and made herself acquainted with all the inequalities of its morocco binding, and at last she said:

"Uncle John, what book is this? It has never been on the table before."

"It is my prayer-book, Agnes," answered Charles; "an English prayer-book."

"What makes you call it an English prayer-book, Dr. Charles? Isn't it just like mother's, in America?"

"Almost like it, Agnes; but ours has some slight alterations."

"Do you attend the English chapel here, Charles?" asked Uncle John.

"Yes, sir, I always go there; and before I used the English prayer-book, I imagined that the alterations in ours were purely such as were rendered necessary by our different institutions; but I find that the language is sometimes altered unnecessarily, and according to my untutored taste not always for the better. For instance, in the English prayer-book one of the evening collects begins, 'Lighten our darkness, O Lord!' Now I think that, as we stand upon the threshold of night, whose gathering shadows are so fitly emblematic of the darkness of our moral nature, there is something singularly beautiful and appropriate in thus beginning our prayer for aid against its perils; and it is incomprehensible that in our version it should have been omitted."

Uncle John was about to reply, but Agnes, with her face full of interest, repeated:

"*'Lighten our darkness, O Lord!'* That prayer suits me, for I am blind! Uncle John, will you buy an English prayer-book for me to-morrow?"

"What for, my daughter?"

"To carry home to mother. She will like it, for it has a prayer in it for her blind child."

"Agnes," said Charles, "wont you let me buy it for you? I would like to do so."

"Yes, sir," she answered, "I would be very much obliged to you if you would."

"Very well, you shall have it; a handsome one, too."

"I don't care about that, Dr. Charles, for I cannot see it; but I can feel that prayer."

The next day the book was bought and given to Agnes. She soon learned to distinguish it from all others, and it was often in her hands, and its beautiful words of supplication were frequently on her lips and in her heart. The song of the Blind Boy was now heard no more, but, in its stead, Uncle John and Charles often caught the murmured words: "*Lighten our darkness, O Lord!*"

Uncle John now began to be perplexed. Agnes had not only lost her spirits, but he was afraid was beginning to lose her health too. It had been a favorite part of his plan to take her to Switzerland, and he was very reluctant to give it up; but he now began seriously to consider whether, since her heart was at home with her organ and her mother, her health would not be better there than it would be even in the mountain air of Switzerland. He had thought of it some days, and had determined to

talk to Charles Beaufort on the subject, when the question was suddenly and most unexpectedly settled.

One night, late in April, when Charles came to dinner, he brought a letter for Agnes, and several newspapers. Uncle John commenced reading the letter to Agnes, and Charles busied himself with the papers, when a sudden exclamation arrested Uncle John in the middle of a sentence, and caused Agnes to ask, in alarm, what was the matter.

It was the news of the fall of Fort Sumter and the beginning of war.

Uncle John laid aside the letter, and listened while Charles read; and then said:

"That decides my movements. I shall go home now."

"And I will go with you, Uncle John. My duty now is at home."

"Yes, Charles, you are right. Every Southern man must now be in his place and do his duty."

"When shall you go, sir, immediately?"

"In about three weeks. Meanwhile, there is one place in Europe that I must visit, if Agnes will consent to go with me."

"What place is that, Uncle John?" asked Charles.

"It is the town of Fribourg; an old-fashioned, quaint-looking Swiss town, with seemingly nothing to interest the traveler except its antiquated and picturesque appearance."

"What on earth, sir, do you want to go there for? I thought that you would of course say Rome, Florence, or Naples, and then I would have envied you your pleasure; but your visit to Fribourg will not tempt me to break the commandment."

"Never mind, Charles, Fribourg is my destination, if Agnes will go with me."

"I will go anywhere with you, Uncle John," she said.

"Well, my daughter, if you will go with me to this Swiss town, as soon as we return I will take you home; is that a bargain, Agnes?"

"Oh, yes, Uncle John!" she answered, joyfully. "I will go anywhere, and do anything for you, if you will only take me home."

"Is my little daughter so very home-sick?"

"Yes, sir, very home-sick."

"Why, then, have you not told me so, Agnes?"

"Because, Uncle John, you knew best what to do, and I did not want you to go back because I was tired. I never intended to tell you that I wanted to go home; but I can tell you now how glad I am that you are going."

"Well, my daughter, you shall go home. Four weeks from

to-night we will probably be sailing upon the ocean, going back to Hopedale, to see once more mother, organ, friends."

Her face was beaming now, and its happiness was reproduced on Uncle John's too strikingly to be altogether a reflection. His own heart, too, was happy at the thought of his return, and for an instant his face was bright with the anticipated pleasure; but the next moment, heart and face were alike clouded by the recollection of his country and the woe overhanging it. The conversation ceased, and they were silent. Agnes's reverie was the only pleasant one. She knew nothing, cared nothing for war, she only knew that she was going to her mother, and she was contented. Uncle John was aroused by her voice, as she said:

"Good night, Uncle John. I am so happy!"

When she was gone, the gentlemen discussed until a late hour the tidings that they had just received, and afterward the change in their plans consequent thereupon.

"Have you ever been into Switzerland, Charles?" asked Uncle John.

"No, sir."

"Then it would be quite worth while for you to go with us. It is probably the last opportunity that you will ever have of seeing that wonderful country, and if I were in your place, I would dislike to return home without having gone there.

"I would be very glad to go, sir, if you can offer me a sufficient inducement; but to encounter that keen mountain air at this season, merely for the sake of going to an old-fashioned town, will not pay for the inconvenience and exposure. I cannot, for my life, Uncle John, imagine what can be the attraction there."

"I will tell you, Charles, and would have told you before, but I don't want Agnes to know what she is going for, since surprise will add to her pleasure. In that quiet old town there is a cathedral, containing an organ, which has but one superior in Europe, and an organist whose marvelous execution is quite as wonderful. It is the only pleasure that I know on the Continent that can be enjoyed by the blind as much as by those who can see; and I am specially anxious that the child, who has been disappointed in all else, should at least enjoy that. Were it not for this, I would go home in the next steamer. It is not, however, to hear organ-music that I wish you to go to Fribourg; it is the grand and wonderful scenery on the road that will be the attraction to you. If you will go with us, I will alter my route. I had intended to go from here to Geneva by rail, and there take

a steamer across the Lake, to Vevay, thus sparing ourselves all fatigue; but if you go, we will take a traveling carriage at Geneva, and go round through Chamouni, giving you the benefit of an excursion to the *mer de glace*. You shall see Mont Blanc, shall cross the Alps, and, if you choose, visit the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard, while we wait for you at Martigny or Vevay."

"That will, indeed, be splendid, Uncle John!" he exclaimed. Yes, indeed, I will go; but," he added, "there is one grave objection. This route, you say, is fatiguing, and I am not willing to subject you and Agnes to it just for my pleasure, when your object could be so much more easily accomplished. How are we to cross the Alps?"

"On mules: there is no other way."

"Then I cannot consent to it. Neither you nor Agnes could bear that."

"You are greatly mistaken. There is a good deal of muscle and sinew yet left in these old limbs of mine, and they can bear much fatigue if there is any occasion for it; and as to Agnes, I am so well acquainted with the Swiss modes of traveling, that I can make her perfectly comfortable. So, now, just say that you will go, and the question of route is not only settled, but it is settled much more to my satisfaction than it was before, when I had determined to go without the fatigue and without your company. I only wish, for your sake, that it was July instead of May. We may have a bright sun, which is, after all, the only thing necessary as far as the scenery is concerned, but it will be very cold."

"I shall not regard that for myself, sir, though I shall regret it on account of you and Agnes. I should be no man, and certainly not a young one, if the excitement and exercise and adventure of such a journey could not keep me warm. No, sir, the cold will, in no degree, abate my enjoyment; if the sun will only shine, I ask no more."

"I am sure that you will enjoy it, Charles, and so will I, although you will have the advantage over me in one respect; novelty will add a keener relish to your enjoyment. I am perfectly familiar with all that scenery, and perhaps my greatest pleasure will be in the recollections that it will awaken. Many, many years ago, when your father and I were young, and had not seen each other since we parted at college, we unexpectedly met at Chamouni, and the very pleasantest recollections that I have of European travel are those of our excursions in that neighborhood. It will be no small enjoyment to recall those scenes and adventures of my youth, in the company of his son. I

wish, for your sake, that we had more time; a whole summer there would scarcely satisfy you."

"Yes, Uncle John, I should like nothing better than to spend the entire summer among those wild mountain passes; but a glimpse and a taste are better than nothing; and since I am obliged to go home at once, and will probably never be in Europe again, I will most thankfully enjoy this little excursion without complaining that it cannot be longer or more satisfying. When shall we go?"

"The sooner the better, Charles. Day after to-morrow, if you can make your arrangements. I think that we ought, by all means, to go home the last of this month; and if we go off immediately, we can allow ourselves three weeks for our excursion."

"I will be ready, sir, by day after to-morrow."

At the appointed time they left Paris, Agnes acquiescing in their movements with quiet indifference. The only question that she asked about their journey was, how long they would be gone. Her hopes and anticipations were centered upon the departure for home, and she cared very little where she spent the interval. Uncle John had not told her why she was going to Fribourg, and she thought that she was only going to gratify him.

Two days were all that they could spare at Geneva, and on the morning of the third they left for Chamouni, in their traveling carriage. It was a magnificent day in May; the air was cold, but pure and bracing, and the sky was cloudless; it was just such a day as in the sunny South the month of October brings us. The country was beautiful, even though not yet clothed in its summer verdure. The vine-clad hills of Savoy wanted the rich drapery of foliage and the purple clusters which, later in the season, would adorn their rugged sides up to the very rock-crowned summits; but to the eye unused to the sight, there was something of interest, if not of beauty, in the gnarled and twisted vines which struggled and clambered up the rocky steeps, and awakened a feeling of commiseration for the arduous and dangerous toil that was necessary to their cultivation. The scene was one of varying interest, and Charles Beaufort's enjoyment fully realized both his own and Uncle John's expectations. He rode with the driver, and was constantly calling attention either to the smiling landscape, or to the peasantry in their parti-colored costume and large straw flats, their gay bright clothing giving to the whole scene the appearance of a picture. Later in the day the scenery grew wilder: the mountains were taller and stood in closer proximity; the road ran sometimes on a narrow ledge, with a frowning precipice of rock on one side and the river on

the other, and then, after awhile, turning away from the stream, it pursued its course through a little valley, whose guardian mountains were so near that it seemed as if a stone could be thrown from one summit to the other. The mountain sides were dotted up to the very top with little spots which the travelers could see were accustomed to cultivation, while here and there on the steep slope was perched a cottage, which seemed inaccessible to anything except the sure-footed and fearless chamois. Now and then, a cascade made a graceful leap down some tall rocky cliff, and before it reached the deep abyss below was dissolved into a soft wreath of mist; on every bold mountain top around, the pure snow rested like a crown of pearl; and at last a sudden turn of the road revealed a majestic mountain with its snow-covered sides and its tall summit enveloped in clouds. The driver drew up his horses, and, pointing with his whip, said, with something almost of reverence in his tone: "Mont Blanc!"

It was almost sunset when the travelers reached the little village of St. Martin's, where they were to spend the night. As soon as they got out of the carriage, Uncle John said:

"We have no time to go into the hotel, Charles. We must hasten to the bridge, and if we are fortunate, we shall have a sunset view of Mont Blanc, exceeding in magnificence anything that you have ever seen."

They walked down to a bridge, spanning the turbulent Arve, and there, at a distance of twelve miles, they stood looking at the monarch of mountains. The summit was still covered with clouds, so that not even the outline was visible; but the pure soft light of the declining sun rested upon its snow-covered sides, investing it with a beauty that is absolutely indescribable. The travelers gazed in silent wonder: the old man, to whom it was perfectly familiar, realized that there are some scenes in nature so far overreaching the grasp of memory, that they can never be recalled, and every time they are looked upon, it is with new admiration and wonder; the young traveler was overpowered with the mingled sublimity and beauty so far exceeding his powers of conception; and the blind child, utterly unconscious of the vision of glory before her, clung to Uncle John's hand, and wondered if the sight was so beautiful that they should enjoy it so quietly.

Mont Blanc towered before them: not the cold, bald, bleak mountain that Charles's imagination had pictured it; pure but icy, grand but passionless, beautiful but dead. No; there was a softness, a warmth, a *living* beauty, imparted to it which, while it did not diminish its grandeur, so mellowed and subdued

it, that the heart borrowed warmth from the mountain of eternal snows. Language cannot picture the peculiar beauty of the tint with which the sunlight clothes Mont Blanc. It is not the cold, dead white of the snow as we see it; there is a luminousness about it which perhaps, more nearly than any other earthly object, resembles "the sea of glass mingled with fire," in the Apocalypse.

The travelers waited for the clouds to leave the summit of the mountain, and they were not disappointed. Gradually they were lifted up and dispelled, and at last, clearly defined against the back-ground of the sky, the peak of Mont Blanc stood revealed, climbing far up toward the zenith. How suggestive of strength is the quiet repose of the grand, silent mountain! What a thought does it awaken of the power of Him who "weighs the mountains in a balance!"

The silence continued unbroken, for language was not needed there. At last Agnes asked:

"Are you disappointed, Dr. Charles?"

"Disappointed at what, Agnes?"

"At the appearance of the mountain."

"Oh no, child! that is impossible!"

"Then why don't you talk?"

"I don't want to talk now, Agnes. I only want to see; eyes are all that anybody wants here!"

How gladly would he have recalled the thoughtless words, as he saw the cloud gather upon the little blind face, and heard the mournful but vain wish:

"How I wish that I could see!"

The words went to Uncle John's heart, and he forgot the majestic glory of the scene before him, in his compassion for the sealed eyes and the soul that were shut out from it. It was the first time in his life that he had ever heard Agnes wish for sight, and he thought, sadly:

"Yes, here, indeed, you are blind, more blind than anywhere else on earth. Here, with the mountain of light full in view, your darkness seems doubly dark."

The sun had now gone down, the air was keenly cold, and Agnes was tired, so she and Uncle John returned to the house, leaving Charles still standing on the bridge, with his eyes riveted upon the mountain, now growing dim and gray in the twilight. There was a comfortable fire in the hotel, and Uncle John drew Agnes close up to it, and, seating himself beside her, tried to tell her about Mont Blanc. She was interested, but he found that words could not picture such a scene, and though he did not say so, still his heart echoed painfully the childish wish—that she could see.

Early the next morning, the travelers exchanged their heavy carriage for a light barouche and strong mountain horses, and left St. Martin's for Chamouni, twelve miles distant. The road was a splendid one, but in many places so precipitous that they progressed very slowly. The scenery throughout the whole distance was wildly romantic. Tall, wild mountains stood all around, and the road wound up and around them, revealing, every now and then, through a break in the chain, the pure white summit of Mont Blanc. The nearer they approached it, the better they could estimate its height and grandeur; but they missed the sunset glow of the evening before, and had no view all that day that was comparable to the one from the bridge of St. Martin's.

The travelers did not find the lonely and solemn road that they might have expected through such a region. Every little while the ear was arrested by the merry jingle of the little bells with which the horses are always decked for these Alpine excursions, and a carriage came in sight, filled with gay and happy pleasure-seekers. Every few miles, a large wooden cross, with no inscription except the date, stood like a solemn sentinel beside the road, and if there was something funereal in its blackness, it at least assured the travelers that they were not on a lonely and unknown road.

During that day's journey, Dr. Beaufort's attention was sometimes recalled from the majestic grandeur of the scenery by objects to which his professional eye was attracted by a strange sort of fascination. They were now in the goitre region. Uncle John could not look at the wretched deformity. His heart sickened at the sight of the revolting, idiotic stare with which he was regarded, and he turned away in disgust from those huge, fleshy excrescences, sometimes divided into distinct compartments, which hung like a bag from the neck down upon the chest; but the physician looked with curious interest upon the deformity of which his books had told him, but which he now saw for the first time in all its hideousness.

Strange, indeed, is it, that such nature should be mingled with such humanity. Here, in the land where nature has blended with marvelous prodigality the sublime and the beautiful, the grand and the picturesque, strange, indeed, does it seem that she has no child to appreciate and admire her wonders! Instead of the poetic fancy, the exuberant imagination, the strong intellect that we would expect to be cradled amid such scenes, we find the hideous deformity of Cretin idiocy! The stranger and the foreigner come to gaze and wonder, and foreign tongues exhaust their wealth of epithets in striving to describe the scenery of this enchanting country, while Switzerland's own children look with

unmeaning stare upon the majestic grandeur of their native land!

When the travelers arrived at Chamouni, they settled themselves quietly for several days' sojourn, for Uncle John was determined that Charles should have time enough to make the different excursions of which this little town is the radiating point. He himself intended to stay with Agnes, only going where she was able to accompany him.

The morning after their arrival, when they met at the breakfast-table, Charles announced himself ready for the *mer de glace*. He had procured his guide, and provided himself with an Alpine staff, and declared that he was now equal to any danger or fatigue.

"You will be tired enough, Charles, before you get back. Suppose that I send a mule to meet you this afternoon."

"No, indeed, sir! An Alpine traveler can certainly walk a few miles."

"And yet," replied Uncle John, smiling, "the American Alpine traveler might be glad enough to get upon a mule before he returns from the *mer de glace*. If you take my advice, you will let me send one to meet you, this afternoon, at the *Chapeau*."

"No, sir; it is not necessary. I am sure that it cannot be a very fatiguing expedition, for when the guide asked the two Englishmen who are going along if they would ride or walk, they laughed at the idea of riding."

"I suppose so; but you must not measure your endurance by theirs. You know that they are great pedestrians, and in Switzerland you will see as many Englishmen, and women, too, walking, as you see riding."

Charles, however, insisted that he preferred to walk, and Uncle John watched the party with a quiet smile, as he saw them leave the hotel, so full of expectation and adventure. He knew what was before them, and was satisfied that if his English companions should return unfatigued, Charles, at least, would be tired enough.

It was a splendid day, cold, and perfectly clear. They found Montauvert very steep, but their slow ascent was not toilsome, as it was relieved by frequent pauses to look at the view spread out beneath their feet. They rested for half an hour at the house on the summit, where they provided themselves with woolen socks over their boots, to enable them to walk securely over the ice, and then commenced the descent to the *mer de glace*. This was speedily accomplished, for it was short and precipitous, and a few slides and jumps brought them down upon the ice. It is not wide at this point, and up and down, as far as the eye can reach, it rests only upon what seems, indeed, a sea of ice. In it are

crevices and fissures hundreds of feet deep, and upon the brink of the first one of these the party stopped and looked far down into the narrow abyss, whose walls of ice were more exquisitely blue than the clearest October sky. As they listened to the torrent that roared and thundered beneath their feet, they felt a momentary insecurity, when they remembered that the frail and treacherous ice formed the only barrier to this rushing stream; but strong, and seemingly as unyielding as the granite, was the channel through which the waters poured, and upon whose icy sides they made no more impression than if they had been of solid rock. Without thought of risk or danger, they crossed the sea of ice. On the other side, the walk was rough, but not otherwise uncomfortable. Later in the season, a thousand little streams are released by the summer sun from their glacier prisons in the Alps, and flowing down the mountain side, intersect the path at short intervals, without either bridge or stepping-stones, and the traveler must walk bravely through them; but, as yet, they were still locked in their wintry sleep, far away in the mountains, and the pedestrians pursued their way over the dry and rocky ground, looking at and talking of the wonders that were around them.

After awhile, the path grew narrower, and they walked along singly, and, presently, Charles, who was behind, heard the guide call out:

"Prenez garde!"

They had reached the *mauvais pas*, a narrow ledge upon the side of a sheer precipice, overhanging an abyss seemingly without a bottom. The path was just wide enough to plant the foot securely on; sometimes straight, sometimes winding round the corner of a rock, and sometimes descending by little steps cut in the side of the perpendicular stone. It is just here that the traveler enjoys the finest view of this wonderful scene; and although a false step, or a dizzy brain, would have plunged him into a depth that seemed fathomless, yet Charles could not resist the temptation to look around him. The ice was thrown together in huge, irregular masses, such as the imagination pictures the hummocks of the polar seas; as if the waves, while roaring, and tossing wildly to and fro, had suddenly been arrested and congealed, and left forevermore motionless and voiceless. It was a silent sea; no breeze awakened a low, murmuring response from its billows; the only sound that broke the awful stillness was the occasional crash with which a dismembered fragment left the mighty mass, and the sullen, distant plunge with which it seemed to fall into the very depths of the earth.

Along this precarious pathway they walked about three hun-

dred yards, their only support being a frail rope, secured by iron stanchions in the rock. Our travelers were not averse to a sufficient amount of danger to give zest to their excursion, neither did they fear their strength of head and nerve, yet it was with a feeling of relief that each one planted his foot once more upon terra firma.

When they were fairly over, one of the Englishmen drew a long breath, and said, grumblingly:

“‘*Mauvais Pas*,’ indeed! Just like a delicate, mincing Frenchman, to call a four-inch path along a sheer precipice, hundreds of feet high, *a bad step*! If an Englishman had had the naming of that place, he would have called it in plain, downright terms, ‘the dangerous path,’ or ‘the ledge of the precipice,’ or something else that would have given the traveler an idea of what he would have to encounter; the Frenchman tells him in delicate terms of the uncomfortable, the bad step, and lo! when he comes to it, he finds a place where any step, for three hundred yards, may easily be a fatal instead of a bad one!”

They were still a long distance from the *Chapeau*, and when they at last reached the house, they were not unwilling to partake of its refreshment and rest. They stopped here an hour, and not long after they began the descent of the mountain; Charles regretted that he had not permitted Uncle John to send a mule to meet him here as he had proposed. The rest had completely refreshed his companions, but he was very much fatigued, and found it difficult to keep pace with their rapid step. Long before they reached the foot of the mountain, as Uncle John had prophesied, he was too tired to enjoy the ever-varying prospect which the winding road unfolded. Night had closed in when they arrived at Chamouni, and, thoroughly wearied, Charles went to bed without stopping to give Uncle John the particulars of his excursion.

The two following days he undertook the other more difficult and dangerous expeditions in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, Uncle John and Agnes took short walks about the village, talking of the objects around them, but most generally calling up a smile by a word about home, or an allusion to their departure from Europe. Swiss air and Swiss travel, even at this early season, seemed to have realized Uncle John’s hopes. The roses were beginning to show themselves upon Agnes’s pale cheeks, her step was more elastic, and, since the promise of a return home, her spirits had rebounded, and she was always cheerful, and sometimes even gay. All this Uncle John noted with pleasure; and since the special object of his mission had failed, he was now contented

with the small compensation of restoring her to her mother, strong and robust.

They had been in Chamouni three days, when Uncle John said to Charles:

"There is but one more excursion for you to make from here, unless you intend to ascend Mont Blanc."

"No, sir, I have no desire to do that at any season, but especially at this time of the year. I like adventure well enough, when there is anything to be gained by it; but the ascent of Mont Blanc, I am sure, would not repay me for the suffering and danger. I would much rather look upon the grand old mountain from below, than to climb it, and look upon a view which, if not obscured by clouds, must be indistinct from distance."

"Then to-morrow is the last day that we need stay here. While you are gone to the Flégère, I will make the arrangements for our departure. There are two mountain passes by which we can reach Martigny, and I leave you to choose between them."

"A privilege of which I shall not avail myself, sir, since you are much more competent than I am to decide. I shall find enough to enjoy on either route."

"Then if I am to choose, I will say the Tête Noire; and if the weather is good, we will leave here day after to-morrow morning."

"Very well, sir, I will be ready. You will not go, I suppose, unless it is a clear day."

"By no means. There is no more forlorn and dreary discomfort imaginable, than a rainy day in the Alps. Besides, Agnes could not bear such exposure. No, if it is at all threatening we must wait."

The morning of the departure was clear and bright, and Uncle John left Agnes hovering over the fire, while he went to superintend the arrangements. At ten o'clock they were ready to go. Uncle John, Charles, and the guide were each mounted on a mule, and Agnes, carefully wrapped in her traveling shawl and a blanket, was carried by the guide. She did not object by words to this arrangement, but it was very evident that she did not like it; she acquiesced, however, when Uncle John told her that she was much safer with the guide than she would be with him. There was of course little pleasure for her that day, although Uncle John rode as near to her as possible, and whenever it was practicable talked to her. Four hours' riding brought them to the summit of the pass, and they stopped at the little hotel for dinner and rest. Here Uncle John had determined to spend the night, if Agnes should be tired; but her ride, though a lonely one, was not fatiguing, for her guide, interested in

the blind child, whose weariness he could not even relieve by conversation, had done all that he could to make her comfortable.

After an hour's rest they mounted their mules again, and soon found themselves following a narrow path, which only admitted one horseman at a time; and they were in the midst of mountain scenery which, for grandeur and sublimity, is perhaps not excelled in the world. Far in the depths below, a roaring torrent boiled and raged; the precipice of rock frowned above, while in every direction huge rocks were thrown about and heaped up in the wildest chaos, and covered with moss and vegetation, as if the mighty convulsion which had rent them asunder had occurred centuries ago. The whole aspect of nature was that of silent, solemn grandeur. The noise of the torrent, that chafed and thundered below, was so subdued and mellowed by distance that it rather deepened than disturbed the oppressive silence. Sometimes the path wound along the ledge of a precipice, from whose abyss below it was protected only by a frail railing that quaked in the mountain breeze, while on the other side, seemingly within a stone's throw, rose just such a mountain as the one that the travelers were ascending.

Later in the day, as they emerged from these somber forests, the scenery again assumed the features of the picturesque, and bounding cascades, sparkling glaciers, châteaux, and the chamois moving fearlessly along the edge of the precipices, gave life and animation to the scene. About sunset the party reached Martigny. Agnes was very glad to be told that she was at the end of her journey, and when she parted from her guide she thanked him kindly, through Uncle John, who acted as interpreter, for his gentle care, while Uncle John, by some extra francs, gave him a substantial proof of his own appreciation of his kindness.

The next morning, Charles went to visit the hospice of the Great St. Bernard, where he would spend the night, and rejoin his companions at Vevay, whither they were to go during the day.

There was nothing at this beautiful Swiss town that Agnes could enjoy. The lovely blue waters of Lake Geneva; picturesque cottages along the road between the town and the Castle of Chillon, a few miles distant; the gloomy castle itself, with that dark prison-vault, linked by the poet's genius to immortal verse; the magnificent dahlias of such luxuriant growth and richness of coloring,—all these combine to make Vevay a most interesting and attractive spot to the ordinary traveler, but it could have no charms for a blind child. After dinner, she and Uncle John went out into the yard, and sat down upon a rustic seat under a tree. The fresh breeze and warm sunshine were pleasantly com-

mingled, and she enjoyed them as they talked together, while his eyes rested upon a picture of surpassing loveliness. The lake slept in quiet beauty, and, on the opposite side, mountain rose upon mountain in the distance, some covered with snow, and some glowing in the mellow sunlight, while over the whole landscape there rested a soft purple haze, which subdued each rugged outline without obscuring a single feature of the scene. In all his wanderings, Uncle John had never looked upon a lovelier picture, and he fell into a quiet contemplation of it, from which he was aroused by the question:

"What are you thinking about, Uncle John?"

He would not tell her that he was enjoying a pleasure which she could not understand; and so, instead of answering her question, he asked another:

"Agnes, the lake is very smooth; how would you like a sail upon it?"

"Very much, indeed, Uncle John."

"Then come, and we will go at once."

"How far is it to the lake?"

"We are on the shore of the lake now. A flight of stone steps leads from this yard, where we are sitting, into the water. At the foot of these steps nicely cushioned boats are moored, whose scarlet flags with white crosses in the center are waving at the stern. We will get into one and have a pleasant sail."

They rowed over the water until sunset, Agnes enjoying the fresh air, and the pleasure of leaning over the side of the boat and dipping her hand in the cold waters. When they returned to the hotel they learned that Dr. Beaufort had arrived some time before, and had gone to visit the Castle of Chillon. He did not get back until after nightfall, and was full of the enjoyment of his excursion to St. Bernard, and Agnes fell asleep upon the sofa while he was talking enthusiastically of pleasures which were to her vague and dark unrealities.

The next morning, they left Vevay in a traveling carriage, drawn by four stout horses, whose little bells jingled merrily as they climbed the mountain. Notwithstanding the bracing air and the exhilaration of their mode of traveling, Agnes was to-day weak and languid. She insisted that she was not sick, that she was only tired; but Uncle John was afraid that, in spite of all his efforts to render the journey easy for her, her strength had been too severely taxed. They reached Fribourg early in the afternoon, and Uncle John was rejoiced that they had at last arrived at their destination, and he determined to remain there until Agnes should be thoroughly rested. He felt no anxiety now about her being interested and entertained; no fear lest the

time might hang heavily, or the days pass wearily by; he knew that there was for her there an unfailing source of happiness, and that his only difficulty now would be to persuade her to leave when it should be necessary to do so.

As they drove rapidly through the streets, Charles saw enough to excite his curiosity and make him anxious to study in detail the features of this singular looking place. Its situation is most romantic, the town being divided by immense ravines, spanned by bridges, two of which are suspension bridges, the only link to bind this quaint old town to the present. Everything else seems to belong to the far-distant past, and is black with the smoke and dust and mould of age. Upon one of these bridges, Charles stood and looked with wonder into the ravine below, where men looked almost as small as children. The bridge is said to be as high above the street underneath it as the precipice of Niagara, and it certainly seemed to our traveler to be a dizzy height. He was so absorbed that the gathering clouds failed to attract his attention, when all at once he was aroused by the large heavy drops of rain. The storm came as suddenly and violently as only it can come in mountain countries, and by the time he reached the hotel it was pouring in torrents, with severe thunder and lightning.

He found Agnes asleep upon the sofa, and Uncle John watching her anxiously.

"I am uneasy about her, Charles," he said.

"There is no occasion for anxiety, Uncle John; it is only fatigue."

"She was so bright and well at Chamouni. I thought that the Swiss air was going to work wonders for her; but to-day she has been more languid than I have seen her since she left home."

"That is nothing, Uncle John. The child is tired, and a few days' rest will make her as strong as ever."

"Everything is adverse to my plans to-night, Charles," said Uncle John, going to the window and looking out at the pouring rain and the flooded streets. "The rain and her indisposition combine to upset a favorite project of mine."

"What is that, sir?"

"It is an old man's whim, which I know will excite a smile, even if it does not awaken a doubt with regard to my sanity. For days I have been indulging a pleasant sort of dream, about taking her asleep to the cathedral, and having her awakened by that wonderful organ music. It would be such a delightful surprise to the child. You don't know how much I dislike to give up the idea."

"The plan is rather impracticable, sir," answered Charles, smiling, "especially on such a night as this."

"Her condition, Charles, alone renders it impracticable. If I were certain that she was only tired, and not sick, I would not hesitate to try it, for I know that I could protect her from the rain."

"Why not wait until to-morrow night, as we are to stay here some days?"

"Because the organist will not play again, either to-morrow or the next night. He is a professor of music in Berne, and only comes here on certain nights in the week to play for the benefit of travelers, for many lovers of music come to Fribourg especially to hear his wonderful performance. Besides, I want Agnes to hear the music before she knows what I brought her here for."

"How is she to get to the cathedral?"

"In my arms."

Charles now laughed outright, and said:

"Indeed, Uncle John, I must feel your pulse and examine your brain, for you must be either delirious or deranged."

"No, sir, I am neither, as I will prove to you if you will only give me a professional assurance that Agnes is not sick. My only disease is an old man's desire (perhaps an undue one) to give to a blind child an unexpected pleasure, of whose intensity you can form no idea until you have seen for yourself her great enjoyment. So tell me, first of all, if Agnes has a fever, and if not, then tell me if you will help me to carry out my plan."

"She has no fever, I assure you," he replied, feeling her pulse; "and if I can do anything to help you I will most gladly do it, but I do not believe that it will be possible to carry Agnes to the cathedral without awakening her."

"I could do it, if it would only stop raining, or if it would even rain in moderation; but if this storm continues, I do not myself think that it could be done."

"You must let me take her, Uncle John; you are not strong enough."

"Indeed, I am. I could carry a much heavier burden than her slight weight, and besides the cathedral is a very short distance from here. As to your taking her, you would awaken her in five minutes; but, old bachelor as I am, I know how to take care of her, for she has gone to sleep in my arms many, many times in her life. So let us make our arrangements to go, and if there should be a lull in the storm we will be ready to take advantage of it. Go down and buy our tickets, which you can do here in the hotel, and see if you can get a lantern."

The rain still poured, the thunder shook the house, and every now and then a broad bright sheet of lightning lighted up the room. Uncle John walked up and down, thinking of Grace and her disappointment when he should give Agnes back to her, still blind. Presently the servant came with the lamp, and as Uncle John passed by the sofa, he stopped and looked at the sleeping child. Weariness had prostrated her completely, and she lay with her long hair shrouding her face, and her arm thrown over her eyes as if to shade them from the light.

"No need," he said, "to shade those blind eyes; would to God there were!"

After awhile Charles returned, and said that the rain had temporarily ceased, and perhaps if they would go at once they could reach the cathedral before it began again.

Their preparations were soon completed; and when Charles saw the gentleness and dexterity with which Uncle John handled Agnes, he was convinced that, as he himself had said, he knew how to take care of her.

It was very dark when they went into the street, and the feeble light of the lantern was almost quenched in the surrounding gloom. When they reached the cathedral they found the doors not yet opened, and they were compelled to stand and wait. As one and another were added to the waiting group, they looked with wonder and curiosity upon the foreigner with his singular burden; but unconscious that he was the object of interest or remark, he leaned against the heavily carved portal, and in his anxiety to keep Agnes from being awakened he forgot all else. Presently the crowd gave way to a man who approached with a lantern, and motioning Uncle John aside, he swung open the heavy doors. All was black darkness within, except that in the dim distance Uncle John and Charles saw one feeble ray, which they followed, until they found it was the sexton's lantern, by the light of which he was seating persons in the other end of the church. By degrees, their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and looking around and above them, where two or three glimmering lights betrayed the position of the organ, they selected a seat at a proper distance.

It was a strange audience that was assembled in the Fribourg cathedral on that stormy night; men and women and one blind child, some from a distant continent beyond the sea, some from Britannia's Isle, and others who were born and reared in the same old town which had singularly enough produced the sweetest of organs and the most gifted of musicians. There they all sat in the stillness and darkness of midnight. Scarcely a whisper was heard, and a reverent silence pervaded the assembly.

Presently the deep trembling tones of the organ broke the stillness, and deeper and louder and more tremulous they grew, until it was difficult to believe that the rushing wind, of which it was so wonderful an imitation, was not sweeping wildly through the cathedral aisles.

Uncle John felt a thrill pass through Agnes's frame as she sprang up, and called aloud :

"Uncle John !"

He clasped her hand tightly, and whispered :

"Here I am, Agnes."

She was satisfied. She knew not, cared not where she was or how she had come there ; she knew that Uncle John was with her, and that she was listening to her own dear organ, and she was happy.

The strange performance went on. Thunder, lightning, wind, and storm exhausted themselves in wild unearthly music, and then died away in a strain so sweet and low that it might almost have been mistaken for an angel's whisper. Quicker and quicker grew the throb of the childish heart, and tighter was the grasp with which she clung to Uncle John, but she did not speak. It was a double spell that bound him, for he heard the music through Agnes's ears and felt it through her soul. Sometimes its crushing power made the stone walls tremble, and then gradually the strain wandered farther and farther away, until all that was left was a soft, sweet echo, so pure and so distant that it might have been awakened in the snowy bosom of the far-away Mont Blanc.

At length there was a long pause : artist and instrument seemed alike to have exhausted their wealth of harmony. Uncle John's hand had grasped Agnes's shawl, when there stole through the gloom such a strain of heavenly sweetness that his outstretched arm was arrested, and though he was not unfamiliar with this strange music, still he listened in breathless wonder as he had done the first time that he ever heard it.

Sweeter than the softest flute it floated through the air, and presently another strain was interwoven with it,—a low, subdued, liquid tone of the human voice, that blended with each organ note the most exquisite harmony. It did not strike the ear ; the listener knew not that it reached the heart through the medium of a bodily organ ; it seemed to melt and flow at once into the very soul.

Agnes was very still ; she clung closely to Uncle John, and scarcely dared to breathe.

At length it was all over ; the last note died away, and they waited, but in vain, for another awakening. Presently a soft whisper said :

"Uncle John, come close."

He leaned down, and she asked, softly :

"Uncle John, is it heaven?"

He did not reply, but the tears sprang to his eyes, tears of pleasure at the thought that he should have given her so much happiness.

The audience quietly dispersed. The storm was over; the elements had ceased their strife, as if to listen, and the spirit of sweet peace had been wafted upon the wings of that music until it seemed to rest upon earth, and air, and sky.

Agnes did not speak until the fresh air upon her face told her that they were out of doors, and then she only asked :

"Where have we been, Uncle John?"

"In the church, my daughter."

This was all; on their way to the hotel she did not say another word.

When Uncle John left the cathedral, he looked in vain for Charles. He knew that they went in together, and that he had taken a seat near him, but he had not thought of him since. He waited a few minutes at the door, but he did not come, and supposing that he must have gone on, he returned with Agnes to the hotel. After seating her upon the sofa, Uncle John waited some minutes for her to tell him how she liked the music, but she was not disposed to talk, and at last he asked :

"What are you thinking about now, daughter?"

"I was thinking that I did not want any eyes to-night."

"Why not, Agnes?"

"Because, Uncle John, ears and soul were enough for me to-night."

"Would you like to know, Agnes, what I was thinking about while I was listening to that beautiful music?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was thanking God that there was one pleasure in this world that my little blind Agnes could enjoy just as much as anybody else. That was what the music said to me all the time."

"And it said to me, Uncle John, 'Agnes, you do not need any eyes to-night;' and my heart said back, 'No, I do not.' But, oh! Uncle John, while I listened to that last strain, I forgot that I was blind. I did not think about myself at all. I thought it must be heaven, and that I was listening to the angel's song. I was never, never so happy before!"

Just then Charles Beaufort burst into the room, saying :

"I like old cathedrals well enough in the daytime, but I would not care to spend the night in one, as I thought I would have to do to-night."

"How so, Charles?" inquired Uncle John.

"Well, sir, when I awoke from the trance into which the music had thrown me, I was leaning against a column far away from everybody else, and the people were leaving the church. How I got there, I do not know; but I do know that when I found out that there was a probability of my spending the night in that dark, lonely old church, I stumbled along toward the door with more haste than reverence. I was not far from it when it closed, with a bang, to which I responded with a shout. My cries reached the sexton, who opened it again, and called out something in German, to which I eagerly replied in English, and rushing toward the light cleared the door with a bound, and left him muttering something, which I interpreted as curses upon that same unfortunate 'stupid Englishman' who gets so many maledictions in Paris."

"I congratulate you upon your escape from prison, Charles," said Uncle John, laughing. "Next time, you must keep your senses about you and be wide awake."

"I can do so, sir, ordinarily; but a man is excusable for being somewhat bewildered under such circumstances. Uncle John, I am fully repaid for coming to Fribourg."

"And I, Charles," he answered, with a glance at Agnes's happy face, "am repaid a thousandfold for whatever fatigue or inconvenience I have encountered in getting here. You see that, after all, the old man's whim proved neither foolish nor impracticable."

"No, sir, it was a complete success. What did you think, Agnes, when that music woke you?"

"I did not think anything, Dr. Charles, I was too happy to think."

"What did you think of the music?"

"I did not think about it at all, sir, I only felt it."

"That is true, Agnes, and is, perhaps, the very best description that can be given of it."

Agnes was now thoroughly awake and refreshed, and Uncle John could not persuade her to go to bed. He thought that it was only excitement, but she insisted that the music, to use her own expression, "had *rested* her." Uncle John and Charles discussed, until a late hour, the instrument and the performer, and their wonderful adaptation to each other; but Agnes did not talk, nor did she seem to be thinking; perhaps she was still "*feeling*" the music.

When she knelt down that night, she did not know that any other ear save that of her Heavenly Father heard her thank Him for having given her ears instead of eyes; but Uncle John looked

with reverence upon that little kneeling figure, and listened with awe to that strange thanksgiving.

They had been more than a week in Fribourg, and had heard the organ three times. One morning, Uncle John said:

"Agnes, it is time to leave Fribourg; are you ready?"

"Yes, sir, if you want to go," she answered, her tone contradicting her words.

"We ought to go, my daughter, if we hope to reach Paris in time for the steamer. You want to go home, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I want to go home; but I wish either that my home was in Fribourg, or that the organ and organist were in Hope-dale."

"I wish, indeed, my daughter, that you could always have access to such a pleasure, and I am truly glad that I have been able to let you enjoy it once in your life. You know now why I wanted you to come with me to Fribourg, don't you?"

"Yes, sir; you wanted to hear this organ, and you wanted me to hear it, too."

"I wanted you to hear it, Agnes, that is all."

"Don't you like it yourself, Uncle John?" she asked, amazed.

"Yes, my daughter, few persons could enjoy it more, for you know how dearly I love music; but I have heard it several times before, and should never have undertaken such a journey at my age just to hear it again. No, Agnes, I came here solely for your pleasure, and intended to do so when I left home."

"Then why didn't you tell me, Uncle John?"

"Because I thought that the surprise would make it the more pleasant, and so it did, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I cannot tell you what a happy feeling it was to be awakened by such music."

"I am sorry, Agnes, that we must leave this pleasant old musical town, but we will be obliged to go."

"When, Uncle John?"

"We ought to go to-morrow."

"Then may I go to the cathedral again to-night?"

"The organist will not play again until to-morrow night."

"Just once more, Uncle John," she pleaded. "Only stay long enough to let me hear that music once more, and I will not ask again."

"If we wait, Agnes, until the day after to-morrow, we will have to travel night and day in order to get to Paris in time for the steamer, and I am afraid that you cannot bear the fatigue."

"Oh, yes, Uncle John, I can bear anything; and I will not complain once, or say that I am tired, if you will only let me stay."

He could not resist the childish pleading and the earnest face, and he could not refuse the pleasure to one who had so few.

The next night, when the last strain of the music had died away forever, it was painfully echoed by the low sob of a childish heart, which clung to this one great pleasure of her blind life as she would have done to a dear human friend.

CHAPTER XV.

"ALMOST at home, Agnes!" said Uncle John, as from the window of the railway car he caught a glimpse of the spire of Hope-dale Church. "Almost at home, my daughter!"

They were whirled along through woods and fields all familiar enough to him, but she sat in her blindness, a stranger to scenes among which she had dwelt from her infancy. There was no darkness, however, in her heart or upon her face; all was the sunshine of joy there, for the thought of home had lifted every cloud from her spirit.

To the mother the meeting was one of painful pleasure. She had tried hard from the beginning not to hope, and she believed that she had now become accustomed to the thought that hope was vain and effort useless; but when she saw Uncle John lift Agnes out of the carriage and lead her to the house, just as he used to do, she realized how bitterly she was disappointed; and when she clasped to her heart her little blind child, as blind as ever, the joy of reunion was for the time lost in sorrow.

"Take me to the parlor, mother," she said, "where my organ is."

The mother led her into the parlor and seated her at the organ.

"I don't want to play now, mother. I must talk to you first, and to my organ next; but I like to sit here and touch the keys. I am so glad, so very glad," she added, with one hand grasping her mother's, and the other resting upon the keys, "to be near you both once more. Uncle John, mother has dressed the room with flowers for us, hasn't she?"

"Yes, Agnes, it is full of flowers, but how did you know it?"

"The whole house is perfumed with the yellow jasmine that I love so much. I wonder if it is as pretty as it is sweet?"

"Yes, Agnes, it is very beautiful, and grows in long garlands, and looks just like spring. I think with you, that it is one of the sweetest flowers in the world."

The child talked on in a joyous strain, for she was very happy, and her heart must find some outpouring; but her mother said very little. Uncle John did not stay long. He had met Grace as he had parted from her, kindly, almost tenderly. There was no need to impose any restraint either upon her words or manner, for she was too much preoccupied with Agnes to have remarked it, if there had been more of kindness than ever before. He needed no words to assure him how welcome he was, and how unfeignedly glad she was to see him—her face told all that; and yet it was so natural, and so much a matter of course, that when he reflected upon it, it gave him no encouragement to hope either that she responded to his feelings, or even suspected what they were.

When he went home he was welcomed gladly by his servants, and his house wore its most inviting aspect, for Grace and Julia and Eva had used their utmost efforts to make it comfortable, and the choicest flowers from the Hall had been pressed into service to beautify it; yet when Uncle John went into the parlor, it looked lonely; when he sought refuge in the library, he turned away from those voiceless companions, and longed for a human friend; and when he finally wandered into the dining-room and looked upon the tea-table, already spread out, with its solitary plate, he thought of the social meals to which he had been for months accustomed, with Charles Beaufort opposite him and Agnes at his side, and never since the disappointment of his early life had Uncle John felt so lonely as he did during the first half hour after his return home.

He threw himself into an arm-chair by the window, and exclaimed:

"Heigh-ho! Uncle John, you will be lonely enough now, old fellow! No Charles, no Agnes, nobody to be anxious about, nobody to talk to, nobody's comfort to consult but your own! Heigh-ho! heigh-ho! I suppose that you will get accustomed to it after awhile, as you were before!"

"Here he is, sure enough!" exclaimed a merry voice, as two arms encircled him, and a bright face was presented for a kiss.

"Uncle John, I am glad to have you at home once more."

"And I am just as glad to see my sunbeam," he answered.

"Why, child, your face has brightened the whole room."

Julia and her father followed, and Uncle John would have been the most exacting old bachelor in the world if he had desired any more cordial welcome than he received from them all.

"Whose work is all this, Eva?" said Uncle John, pointing to the vases of flowers, the florals, and the basket hanging in the

window, with its garlands of jasmine drooping gracefully, and swaying in the breeze. His eyes rested most admiringly upon this last, and Eva answered :

"I knew that it would be so ! Everything that sister does you think is done better than anybody else could do it. When we were arranging these flowers this morning, I said that you would admire her basket more than all the rest."

"But I have not said so, Eva," he replied, laughing. "I have not said that it was handsomer than either the vases or the floras, neither did I know that it was her handiwork. It was yourself, Eva, not Uncle John, who decided in favor of the basket."

"Ah, Uncle John, I can tell well enough what you think, even without words. However, I believe I must agree with you that it is the prettiest thing in the room."

"The flowers are all beautiful, Eva, and most tastefully arranged. It is almost a pity that you have wasted your time and taste upon the dwelling of an old bachelor."

"They were not wasted, Uncle John. If you are an old bachelor, you love and admire pretty things as much as anybody; and it was just because you had nobody at home to dress up your house to welcome you that we did it."

"Then, Eva, there is some compensation after all for my bachelorhood, if I can enlist the sympathies and command the services of warm young hearts and skillful fingers like yours and Julia's. But it is not every old bachelor who is so fortunate."

"No, sir, because you are not crabbed and crusty as most of them are. You are so easy to please, Uncle John, so little disposed to find fault with and complain of the world at large, and your own condition in particular, that nobody would suspect you of being an old bachelor if you did not tell them so."

"Well, Eva," said her father, "Uncle John doubtless feels obliged for your compliment to him, but it is given at the expense of the whole brotherhood to which he belongs; and these, I imagine, would not be greatly flattered by your opinion of them as a class."

"Why, papa, they could not be surprised at it, for their crustiness is proverbial, and I know that Uncle John is admitted by everybody to be an exception to them generally."

"Eva," said Uncle John, "you have given me the sunny side of bachelorhood; come with me, now, and I will show you its shadow."

She followed him, and so did the others, into the dining-room, and he pointed to the single plate upon the little tea-table.

"That is what I call the very embodiment of loneliness. I was accustomed to it before I went away; but now, since I have

had a little family circle around me, of which I was the center, you have no idea how desolate this looks."

"It is lonely enough!" answered Eva. "I would not stay here, Uncle John. Come, go home with us, and stay awhile at the Hall, and accustom yourself to this by degrees."

"A fine way to accustom myself to it," he said, smiling, "to go to the Hall and be for awhile one of your happy, social circle! No, Eva, this is home, and I must stay here, and I might as well begin at once."

"Our circle is not so happy and social, Uncle John," she answered, in a low tone, "as it used to be. Papa and sister are now-a-days very often silent and sad."

Uncle John saw the deep shadow that gathered upon Mr. Cameron's face, and heard Julia's half-uttered sigh. He wondered what could be the cause of that silence and sadness of which Eva had spoken, and which he himself had even thus early remarked; but he hastened to change the conversation, and said, pleasantly:

"Well, Eva, if I cannot go home with you, you can all, at least, stay to tea with me to-night, and relieve me of a few hours' loneliness. What do you say?"

"With all my heart, Uncle John, if papa and sister will consent."

They assented; and when tea was announced, and they went into the room, Uncle John said:

"Strange, indeed, what a difference is made in the aspect of a table by the addition of two or three cups and plates! When I came in here, an hour ago, I thought that it was the most cheerless looking room that I had ever seen. Now it looks quite comfortable. Julia, you must pour out the tea."

When they were seated at the table, he said:

"This reminds me of our little round-table in Paris. I played the part of the lady there, and made the tea. Charles sat opposite me, and Agnes on my right. We were famous housekeepers there, I assure you."

"Poor little Agnes!" said Mr. Cameron. "So, after all your trouble, Uncle John, nothing could be done for her!"

"No, sir; her blindness is total, and life-long."

"So I was afraid you would find it. I always believed that your effort would be a useless one."

"Not altogether useless, Mr. Cameron. It is a satisfaction to me beyond all price to know that I have done all that I could for her. I was not, as you know, very sanguine of success; and yet, if I had not made the attempt, I should always have reproached myself. I loved the child, and"—he added with a slight hesita-

tion—"I felt interested in the mother. She was not able to incur the expense of the experiment, which I could do very well. If it had been merely to confer a passing pleasure upon Agnes, I should not have thought it worth so much trouble and inconvenience and anxiety; but to try to give her sight seemed to me a duty. Now that it is done, I am satisfied; disappointed, it is true, for I hoped more than I was conscious of; but still I am satisfied, now that it is decreed that she must ever remain blind, and all that we can do for her is to make her as happy as we can under the circumstances."

Julia looked an earnest approval, but, as usual, said nothing; but Eva spoke out, as she always did, without reserve:

"I told you so, papa! I told you that Uncle John was different from all the other bachelors that ever lived. Show me another anywhere that would be so good and unselfish, especially to a child in no way related to him. I don't believe that there is another Uncle John in the world!"

The hearty sincerity of the speaker, the admiration which he had so unconsciously excited, and the abruptness and unexpectedness with which she spoke out her feelings, altogether disconcerted Uncle John, and in a moment the crimson flush mounted to his temples. Then he said, quietly:

"I deserve no credit for what I have done, Eva. It does not argue any very unusual degree of kindness and unselfishness to feel sorry for a blind child, and to be willing to relieve her."

He changed the subject; and in a few minutes was talking to Mr. Cameron of the condition of the country, and the disastrous results to both sections, of the war just commenced; a war whose end none could foresee, whose sufferings none could compute. He talked, as he always did, calmly, dispassionately, and reasonably; and Mr. Cameron was impressed, as he had often been, with the justness, the freedom from prejudice, the candor and good sense with which he viewed things. His serenity and evenness of temper were among his most engaging characteristics, and as the heat of passion never obscured the clearness of his mental perceptions, his judgment was generally good and reliable. He spoke of the probable duration of the war, of the absurdity of the expectation of the Federal Government to march a victorious army direct to Richmond, and in sixty days to crush a feeble and powerless rebellion. Again, he foresaw the error of the Southern people in believing that one unsuccessful effort would satisfy their enemies, and that a single victory would drive them back to their homes, never to rally again for the conquest of the South. He foretold the pertinacity and success with which fanaticism would go hand in hand with political ambition, and how for a time they

would sway the public mind and bend a nation to their will. He spoke of Old Virginia with moistened eyes, and with that love for the dust of his mother State which characterizes all her children, and which time, absence, exile itself, can never eradicate from their hearts. He spoke, and Mr. Cameron responded with a groan rather than a sigh, of her desolated homes, her soil not sprinkled, but literally drenched, with the blood not only of her sons, but with that of the noblest and best of the land; of her ravaged fields, her ruined farms, her homeless, wandering children, her exiled fathers, her unprotected wives and daughters. Julia's blood ran cold as she listened, for even she had never taken into the account all these horrible evils; but Eva heard the recital with a terror which at first chained her down in breathless silence, and then expressed itself in a shiver that thrilled her whole frame. Uncle John saw it, and said, kindly:

"I was not thinking, daughter. Such themes are not suitable for young ears like yours and Julia's, and it was very thoughtless in me to draw such gloomy pictures. Your father and I have had some experience, and we know that these are the evils that generally follow in the train of war; let us hope, however, my children," he added, with a cheerfulness that he did not feel, "that a kind Providence will in this instance avert many of them, and by shortening the duration of the war, spare us much of its suffering."

"You need not apologize to the girls, Uncle John," said Mr. Cameron, "for what you have said. You have spoken only the truth."

"So I have, sir; but the truth need not always be thrust upon us when it is both unwelcome and unnecessary. There was really little use in rending the veil which mercifully concealed these horrors. The revelation can do them no earthly good, but it may inflict upon them, by anticipation, a degree of suffering which they might have been spared at least for some time to come, if not altogether."

"I shall not anticipate these evils, Uncle John," said Eva, "for that is not my habit, and, moreover, I shall not believe that they are coming until I actually feel them."

"And I," said Julia, "will act very differently. I shall think about them, and try and familiarize myself with the thought of them, so that if they do come I shall not be so overwhelmed with surprise as not to know how to act."

"And, meanwhile, make yourself miserable, sister, by expecting evils that may perhaps never come."

"No, Eva, not at all. I shall not necessarily expect them. I

shall only look upon them as probable, and by reflecting upon them before they come, trying to decide what is right for me to do, I shall be prepared to meet any emergency."

"There spoke my own daughter!" said Mr. Cameron, approvingly.

"I think, Julia," said Uncle John, "that you will find it difficult to decide what you are going to do, unless you really expect the emergency."

"It may be difficult, Uncle John," she answered modestly, "but I do not think that it is impossible. I do not know what is necessary for others, but for myself I do know that reflection is always needful. I never can act wisely and properly when I am suddenly and unexpectedly brought face to face with a great issue. My judgment is sure to be influenced by surrounding circumstances, and I become bewildered, and sometimes cannot tell right from wrong; so that I should greatly deplore the necessity of deciding some great and important question suddenly, especially if I were in the midst of circumstances which would make it more easy, or more comfortable, or safer to do the wrong than the right."

"I believe, daughter, replied Uncle John, "that you are right, as usual. You are not sorry, then, to have looked upon the picture of the realities of war?"

"No, sir. I was at first both startled and astonished; but I would rather be so now, than to have evils, of whose existence I never dreamed, hurled suddenly and unexpectedly upon me. I would rather know that the mountain on whose green slope I had made my home was a volcano, than to learn it for the first time by being awakened from a quiet sleep to see the glare of the lava stream and to feel the stifling ashes of the eruption. No, Uncle John, I am not sorry that you have told me this to-night. Whatever may come now, I shall not be startled and unprepared."

"Unprepared, sister!" exclaimed Eva. "What preparation can anybody make to meet such evils as Uncle John has described?"

"I think, Eva, that it is no small advantage to have looked them calmly in the face beforehand. Any calamity is greatly increased by suddenness. It seems to me that there is a difference between making one's self miserable by anticipating evil, and quietly familiarizing one's self with the thought of it when it is not only possible but probable. The one is a want of faith, the other is a Christian duty."

"Well, sister, I hope that if it ever comes I shall be able to bear it like a Christian, but I cannot help being sorry to have

heard of it beforehand ; for if I allow myself to think of it, I shall be all the time terrified and miserable."

"Then, child," said Uncle John, "try and forget what I have said, and God grant that you may never know more of the evils of war than you have felt to-night while listening to my fancy sketch !"

He could not bear the unusual sight of a cloud upon that bright face, and he added, cheerfully :

"Never mind, daughter ! there is a bright as well as a dark side to the picture, and you shall look upon that ; and when papa and Uncle John are captain and first lieutenant of the old men's company, you and Julia shall make our uniforms. The Confederate gray will correspond with our hair, and I flatter myself that we will make very respectable looking officers."

The cloud did not clear away as he expected, but it rather deepened, and he saw the tears come into her eyes, as she exclaimed :

"Oh, no, Uncle John, never ! It almost broke my heart to send Walter off, although he was young, and I knew that he ought to go ; but I could not bear to see you go, old man as you are, and as to papa, that is not to be thought of ! I cannot give up my father, even to my country !"

The father's eyes moistened as he looked at his young daughters and thought how desolate they would indeed be if he should be compelled to leave them, but he answered :

"You will scarcely be called upon to give up your father, my daughter. The country will have need of strong young men ; old ones such as Uncle John and I would only serve to fill up hospitals instead of ranks, and would require nursing instead of doing active service. But what says my other daughter ? Julia, if I go into the army, will you make my uniform ?"

"Yes, sir. I will make your uniform, and, God helping me, will see you go without one remonstrance or one word of complaint to add to your burden of anxiety at the thought of leaving us unprotected. I pray, papa, that I may be spared such a trial ; but if the country has need of you, and it is right for you to go, I trust that I shall be enabled to bear it bravely as a Christian Southern woman ought to do."

The conversation had now become not only serious, it was positively sad, and Uncle John exclaimed :

"Come, come, girls, this will never do ! It is entirely out of the question to give me such a welcome after so long an absence ! Come, and I will tell you what we did and saw in the old countries, and of the pleasures that even a blind child found there."

And then he told them how they spent their time on the steamer, and of Agnes's strange friend; of their life in Paris, and their journey over the Alps, and Charles's keen enjoyment of it; and of Agnes's delight in listening to the Fribourg organ.

Uncle John talked well, and the girls listened with pleasure to what Eva called his "traveler's tales." She asked many questions about his friend, the doctor, and Uncle John soon saw the cloud all dispelled and her face as sunny as ever.

"By the way, Eva," he said, "this is the very first question that you have asked about your knight. I am afraid that you have lost your interest in him. You have not even asked if I brought him home with me."

"No, sir, because you said in one of your letters that he would not return before the end of the year."

"Yes, but that letter was written before we heard of the declaration of war. Do you suppose that he would have remained in Europe after that?"

"I don't think that he ought to have done it, Uncle John, but I do not know how he would feel and act."

"What do you think, Julia?" he asked.

She colored, but there was no evading the question, and she answered, truthfully:

"If I have read his character aright, Uncle John, I should think that he would certainly have returned home."

"And you are not mistaken, Julia. I parted with him at Richmond."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eva, "I am so glad that he has come! I shall be really delighted to see him once more."

"Which you will probably do before long, Eva, as he is coming to say good-by to me on his way to the army. He has gone to spend a week or so at home, and will then join the troops in Virginia. The very night that he received the news of the fall of Sumter, he wrote to his brother to raise a company for him by the time he returned, the expense of whose equipment he and I are jointly to bear."

"When is he coming, Uncle John?"

"I do not know exactly when, but just as soon as possible. He is very much in earnest, and will not delay unnecessarily."

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough, and the elastic-hearted child forgot all the shadows that had so clouded her spirit an hour before. When she bade Uncle John good-night, she said:

"Will you come to the Hall to-morrow, Uncle John? We need you more than ever, for it is lonely now."

"Yes, daughter, I will come to-morrow. I expect to be

oftener at the Hall than ever, at least for some time to come, until the aspect of my bachelor home becomes again familiar and more tolerable."

After they were gone he went back into the parlor and looked round upon its empty chairs. The porch and the moonlight seemed less lonely than this, so he wheeled his arm-chair into the porch, and drawing a match, he said, as he lighted a cigar:

"This friend, at least, I have access to at all times and under all circumstances. I wish that Charles would come along: this sudden relapse into solitary bachelorhood is intolerable!"

Uncle John puffed, and dreamed, and hoped, and feared all alone in the quiet moonlight; and could his two young friends have looked into his heart and have seen the tumult that was hidden under his calm exterior, they would have been greatly amazed, and their astonishment would not have been lessened to have known that the quiet Grace Merton was the cause of it all.

Uncle John had been in early life impulsive almost to rashness; but the discipline of circumstances and his own studied efforts at self-control had taught him to govern himself, so that he could generally rely upon his ability to curb and restrain his feelings. It did not occur to him that the task would be a harder one at this time than it had been since his youth, and he thought that now, as ever, he had but to determine, and his feelings would at once yield to his will. But for once he had over-estimated his powers of self-control; and when he resolved that for the present he would lock up his feelings in his own breast, and that neither word, look, nor act should betray them to Grace or to any one else, he little dreamed that he was imposing upon himself an impossible task. Had any one predicted that he would have been overcome and carried away by his feelings, he would have spurned the idea as being an impossible weakness for an old man like himself, although natural and probable for a boy like Charles Beaufort. Ah, Uncle John! there are some things in which, despite your gray hairs and experience, you are still a boy, and those who love you best would not have it otherwise.

The next morning, after breakfast, he went to the cottage to see Grace and Agnes. There was no unusual throb of his heart; no, he had reasoned that down last night, and now he could talk to Grace and listen to her as quietly and calmly as he had done before he suspected that Agnes was not the only tie which drew him there daily.

In the excitement of arrival, and during the few minutes that he was there the evening before, he had not observed the wan, careworn, wearied expression that was so evident this morning,

and which it pained him to see. Grace was sadly changed since he had parted from her,—a change, too, which he thought could not altogether be accounted for by her anxiety and disappointment. He was afraid that there was some new cause of sorrow, for which even the pleasure of her child's return could not afford compensation.

The first inquiry was for Agnes. She was still asleep, and her mother said that she was not sick, but she was exhausted with the excitement of pleasure.

Grace felt as she had ever done, free and unreserved with Uncle John. To the affection which had first been awakened by kindness to and interest in her afflicted child, was now added the tie of gratitude which only a mother could feel for a kindness such as he had shown. Like Uncle John, she, too, believed that Agnes was the strong tie that bound him to her, and that the unselfish friendship which she had enjoyed for years, and which she so much valued, belonged to her rather as Agnes's mother than to herself individually. Altogether unconscious of the existence of any other feelings toward her, she greeted Uncle John this morning gladly and kindly. They talked just as they had done for years; and however much she had wondered at the unaccountable reserve of his letters, the moment that she met him she saw and felt that he was the same Uncle John of old, and every feeling of restraint was at once swept away. She told him frankly how very glad she was to have him at home once more, how much she had missed his daily visits, and how frequently she had felt the need of his kind and judicious advice. Then she spoke of her disappointment; and as in that instant the recollection rushed upon her that her whole life had been one long sorrow, and that disappointment in every form and with every aggravation had been her constant discipline, she did what she had never done before; she said, with a wearied though patient expression:

"But, Uncle John, there ought to be no such feeling as disappointment to me. I have known nothing else in my life, and ought to have learned by this time never to expect anything that I greatly desire."

It was the uncomplaining submission of her tone and manner, rather than what she said, that swept away all Uncle John's self-imposed restraint like a barrier of sand before a rushing stream. Before he thought what he was doing, he had said:

"We have both known disappointment, Grace; but, God helping me, if you will but give me the right, I will see to it that you never know more of it, if the love and protection and care of an old man can shield you from it! Grace," he added, hurriedly, "my heart is not so old but that it can feel a fervent love for you;

and to shield you, guard you, love you, will be all the happiness that I will ask in my old age !”

He was answered by a low cry, as with clasped hands and supplicating look, she exclaimed :

“Oh, Uncle John, have mercy upon me, and speak not such another word ! Indeed, indeed you know not what you ask. Oh, God ! oh, God !” she said, almost wildly, “has it come to this ? Is there still another disappointment in store for me, and must I thus lose the best friend that my child and I have ever had ?”

Uncle John was startled and amazed. All this was so different from anything that he had ever seen in her before ; the wild words and wilder manner were such a singular contrast to her accustomed patient and gentle serenity, that he looked at her for some minutes in speechless surprise. Then, taking her hand kindly, he said :

“No, Grace, while I live you shall not lose your best friend. If I may not be anything nearer to you, I will still be the same Uncle John ; and if I may not enjoy the happiness that I crave, I will try and content myself with the lesser one, and my life’s pleasure shall still be to do what I can to make you and Agnes happy. I can do this,” he added, with inexpressible sadness, “for the discipline of my life, like yours, has taught me to bear disappointment.”

His words and tone smote her to the heart, and it required all her efforts to answer :

“I am not ungrateful, Uncle John, nor do I carelessly spurn the love that you have offered me. I cannot tell you why I may not listen to such words ; I can only implore you never again to speak them, and at the same time beg you still to be to me the friend that you have ever been. God knows that I value your friendship more than any earthly blessing, and if that were taken away, I should be desolate indeed !”

“It shall not be taken away, Grace. We may not forget the words that I have spoken this morning, for that is impossible, but we may at least agree that they shall not affect our future intercourse ; that you will regard me in the same light that you did before they were spoken, and will come to me, as you have long done, for counsel and sympathy in all your perplexities and troubles.”

“God bless you for that, Uncle John !” she exclaimed ; “best and most unselfish of men ! and may He reward you for all your kindness to a desolate mother and a blind child ! I cannot talk to you any more now. Go, and come again some time to-day to see Agnes. When next I meet you, you will find me as calm and quiet and sad as you have ever known me, and as I must always be.”

Uncle John walked home dreamily and absently. He had not yet sufficiently recovered from his surprise to think, nor could he yet realize how many hopes of happiness he had based upon those few words which it required but a moment to speak, a moment to answer! He thought of himself for the first time as he entered his quiet home, where the echo of his own footsteps was the only sound that broke the stillness; and throwing himself into a chair, he drew a long, deep sigh, as he thought that his hopes had vanished with the breath that gave them utterance. He sat for a long time in a gloomy reverie. A shadow was upon the face that was generally lighted up by the cheerful spirit and the kind, unselfish heart within. He thought of the blight upon his early life, and its repetition now, and was for a little while almost inclined to find fault with the decree that had inexorably condemned a heart so warm and affectionate as he knew his to be to a life utterly devoid of those objects most calculated to draw out its affections and engage its sympathies. He felt more lonely than ever, for now he knew that there was no end to it this side of the grave, and life seemed to him as long and dreary in the prospect as if he were standing on its threshold instead of approaching its close.

The time passed by, but he took no note of it until he was aroused by his servant, who came to say that the horse which he had ordered to ride out to the Hall had been standing at the gate two hours.

He intended to ride rapidly through the streets, for he did not want to see anybody; and he even regretted the promise to Eva, which obliged him to go to the Hall; but Uncle John could never, at any time, pass rapidly through the streets of Hopedale, much less could he hope to do so now, when he had only the day before returned after several months absence. He was stopped almost every minute to receive the welcome of the men, women, and children, who were sincerely glad to see him once more among them, and he had a kind word and a cordial greeting for them all, and none suspected that Uncle John, who was the same outwardly that he used to be, now carried such a heavy heart. After he had passed the suburbs, he plied his whip, and riding rapidly forward, soon entered into the pleasant shade of a beautiful grove not far from the Hall. Its quiet shadow and cool breeze, so refreshing in a hot June day, were favorable to reverie, and letting the reins fall upon his horse's neck, he was soon again musing sadly upon his fate. This time, however, it did not last long. With a start and an effort he aroused himself, saying:

"This will never do! I am old Uncle John now, and surely ought not to shrink under disappointment, as I did thirty years

ago, when I first learned what it was! I have wasted time enough in useless repining and quarreling with my destiny. I am older and wiser now, and if I am denied the pleasures of life myself, I must learn to be contented to afford them to others!"

He put spurs to his horse, and a few minutes brought him to the old familiar Hall, with its young faces and warm hearts and cordial welcome; and as he walked in, a prisoner between the girls, holding one by each hand, he felt already that he had been ungrateful in thinking his life a joyless one, when he had such an asylum as this, where he might find affection and sympathy in any measure that the most exacting heart could demand.

Eva rallied him upon his fashionable hours, but he quietly and good-humoredly parried her questions as to the cause of his delay; and if he was a shade more thoughtful than usual, and less disposed to tease her, she did not observe it.

The shadow upon that family circle, which they could not altogether conceal the night before, was very evident now to Uncle John. There were lines of care about Mr. Cameron's mouth, and a cloud upon his brow, which he had never seen there before, and there was in Julia's manner a sad listlessness altogether unnatural. Eva only was the same; light-hearted, frolicsome, and happy, delighted to have dear old Uncle John back again, and expressing her pleasure in every look, act, and word.

Uncle John was not too much engrossed with his own trouble to be indifferent to that of his friends; and as he looked upon Julia's sad face, he determined to find out before he went home what it was, and relieve it if he could. She little dreamed that he had already discovered what she so faithfully endeavored to conceal. Not an inconsiderable part of her trial was that she was shut out from sympathy; that she must lock up her feelings in her own breast and seal her lips; and not to father, sister, or friend could she consent to speak of the traitor brother of whom she thought by day and by night. It was the first barrier of reserve that had ever arisen between herself and Uncle John; and while she had painfully thought of it before, she had never realized it until she met him again and felt that even he, her own and her father's best friend, must hear of their trouble from stranger lips, but never from themselves. And since she might not tell him, she did not want him to suspect how deeply she was wounded, and she tried hard in his presence to be her usual self; but he knew her too well to be deceived for a moment, and he saw plainly that something was wrong, even while he was at a loss to conjecture what it was.

In the evening, just before sunset, Eva said:

"Sister, I have ordered the horses for us to take a ride. I want to show Uncle John our large, beautiful wheat fields, and how many acres papa has planted in corn."

"That ride, Eva," he replied, "I must take another day. You may mount Dixie and go where you please, but Julia must go with me to walk in the grove. I have something to say to her."

"Now, Uncle John," she answered, laughing, "it is intolerable for you to begin to show your partiality so early. I did hope that absence would have taught you to appreciate me properly; but if it did not, and if sister should still be the favorite, you would, at least, have learned not to show it so plainly."

"I needed no absence to teach me to value you, daughter," he said; "nor do I design to show any great partiality to your sister now. Some of these days I may have a little private conversation for you, too."

"Never mind," she answered, as she sprang lightly upon her horse, "you may tell sister just as many secrets as you please, and I will know them all before I go to sleep to-night, and Dixie and I will have a nice ride besides."

So saying, she touched the horse with her whip, and, with Carlo following, dashed down the lawn and through the gate before her father had mounted.

"Full of life and health and happiness," said Uncle John to Julia, as they watched her, with her curls flying in the breeze and her cheeks glowing like roses. "May her heart never be heavier than it is this moment!"

They walked down to the grove, whose lengthened shadows had anticipated the quiet repose of twilight. Neither talked much; and, after awhile, coming to a fallen log near the path, he led her to it, and seating her upon it, took his place beside her.

"My daughter," he said, as he looked into her eyes, "something troubles you, and has troubled you all day; may I not know it, and comfort you if I can, and sympathise with you if I cannot comfort?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, truthfully, "something troubles me, and has done so, not only to-day, but many days and weeks; but don't ask me what it is. I cannot tell you, Uncle John. It is a sorrow which I must bear all alone, one which shuts me out alike from comfort and sympathy."

"No, Julia, that cannot be. Give me the privilege, and see if you are not wholly wrong."

"No, Uncle John, I cannot tell you."

She paused a moment; the long pent-up feelings struggled for utterance, but she kept them back, and only said, with bitterness:

"You will learn it soon enough. Everybody can and will tell you, except her who feels it most, whom most it galls."

"Why, my daughter, what can you mean? This is more than sorrow, Julia; it has a keener sting than mere grief. Everybody knows it, yet nobody can sympathize; everybody is talking about it, yet you cannot tell me! I confess that I do not understand you."

There was a few minutes' painful silence. Julia bit her lips in the vain effort to crush her feelings, but it would not do. Presently she sprang up and stood erect before him. Her cheeks burned, and she trembled from head to foot, as she said:

"Uncle John, you shall not hear it first from indifferent and careless tongues, who will discuss it as they would any other piece of idle gossip. From a Cameron's lips you shall first hear of a Cameron's disgrace! Read this."

So saying, she drew from her bosom a scrap of newspaper, wrinkled and worn, and as she gave it to him, she said:

"It is the brand of our disgrace! Our name is now no longer stainless!"

Uncle John read in surprise and sorrow. If he had been a stranger to her, there was that in her attitude and manner which would have betrayed the keenness of the pang; but, knowing her as he did, he fully realized that she had been touched where she was most sensitive.

He drew her down to her seat again, and giving her back the paper, held her hand in silence. Presently she drew it away, and said, hurriedly:

"I told you so; I told you that I could have neither sympathy nor comfort! Even you, the kindest and best of men, have nothing of either to offer me. We are severed, now, even from you."

"My dear daughter," he answered, earnestly, "you ought to know me better than that. For your brother I have the most profound pity, and for you the most sincere sympathy, and it would take much, very much more than this, to sever me from you. But, indeed, Julia, I think that your feelings and notions about this matter, while they are natural and proper to a certain degree, are, nevertheless, in this particular instance, morbid and exaggerated. Your brother has done wrong, grossly wrong, and I tell you frankly that I think he has disgraced himself; but the disgrace does not and cannot extend to any other member of the family."

"Ah!" she answered, shaking her head, "he is son and brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and his conduct must act not only upon himself, but also reflectively upon us. It is

true that he has always seemed to me more like a stranger than a brother, but my feelings do not alter the facts. He is my brother still, my father's son !”

“He is not identified with your family, Julia. Few have known you more intimately than myself, and yet the name of George is never associated in my mind with the rest of you. At the age when he most needed restraint and control, he voluntarily severed all the ties of home and family, and has chosen to continue an exile ever since. You, at home, cannot be held responsible for the views that he may entertain or the principles by which he is governed, nor can his actions possibly reflect upon you. Another thing, Julia ; his conduct will not be regarded by everybody as you look upon it. There are many people who will sustain and laud him for his loyalty to the United States ; and the fact that he is by birth a Southerner, so far from branding him with shame, will, in their eyes, render him only the more deserving of applause. It will not be looked upon in the same light as if in a war with England he should enrol himself with the enemy.”

“How the world will regard it, Uncle John, is a secondary consideration, although I would, of course, greatly prefer that he and all the rest of us should stand fair and unblemished in the eyes of men ; but I am speaking now of the right, the moral right of the action. If it is treason to co-operate with one enemy against your country, it is with another. I cannot see that it makes the least difference whether the enemy is an Englishman or a Yankee, and so I think it must be viewed by all right-minded people. And since, however unjust it may be, it is nevertheless true, that the conduct of one member of a family affects the character of the whole, it follows that the stain of George's treason must cling to the rest of us. His name is ours ; his father is our father ; the mother, whose heart was broken by her undutiful son, was our mother too. Ah, that mother ! how often I have needed her, how often I have longed to have her back ! Now I thank God that she sleeps too quietly to suffer as we do ! Better, far better, that we, her children, should always have needed her, always have longed for her, than that she should have lived to see her first-born son a traitor !”

There was another pause. Uncle John saw that she was right, that she could not be comforted ; and, however morbid he considered her views and feelings, he found that thus far, at least, they had proved too strong to be reached by his arguments. Presently he said, abruptly :

“My daughter, will you allow me the privilege of very plain speech ? Will you forgive me if I find fault with you in this matter ?”

"I can never have anything to forgive you, Uncle John; and as to being found fault with, it is not pleasant, but it is sometimes necessary; and if I had had more of it in my childhood, I would have been the better for it now."

"Then, Julia, I will say frankly that I think you are doing wrong, very wrong, just now. If you will look into your heart, you will find that you are nursing these morbid feelings. I would not undervalue your trial, for I know that it must be a hard one for such a proud spirit as yours to bear; but at the same time, my child, you certainly exaggerate it. The case would be very different if it were your father or Walter; then I grant you that in bitterness and keenness no sorrow could equal it; but it is an unnatural sensitiveness for you to feel as you do with reference to George, who, if a brother, is likewise a stranger, and made so by his own voluntary act. And as to your wearing that little scrap of paper about your person, I did not think that you, with your sound judgment and correct notions, would do such a thing. Tell me what makes you do it?"

"I wear it that I may never forget that the name which has always been my pride is now linked to dishonor. Oh, Uncle John, you do not, you cannot know with what pride and pleasure I have always thought of my stainless name! how I have clung to it, and valued it more than I would acres rich with California gold! I loved the very sound of Cameron. To others there may be nothing musical in it, but to me it has always been associated with everything that was noble and generous, and far removed from everything that was mean and ignoble and contemptible. Papa has taught me to value it, for he has often told me of his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, honest, noble, high-souled men. He loved to talk of them, and I loved to listen, and to feel that my name was theirs. God only knows the bitterness of the thought that henceforth I must despise it! Indeed, indeed, my pride must have been a grievous sin to have needed such a punishment!"

"Exaggerated notions, all, my daughter! While there is a living man to know and understand and appreciate your father and his children, the name of Cameron is not and cannot be allied to shame and contempt. And I think that you are mistaken, too, in imagining that you are being punished for excessive pride. Thoroughly to appreciate, enjoy, and rejoice in the blessings of life, whatever they may be, cannot be a sin; it must rather be a Christian duty. Pride in an unsullied name and family honor cannot be wrong, for the Bible itself teaches its priceless value; but if it were, are you doing anything to eradicate it when you wear that torturing piece of paper in your bosom? It seems to

me more like thrusting the barb in deeper, than healing the wound. Now, my child, throw that paper away. Be distressed and mortified, if you will, at your brother's course, for that is natural and proper; but do not think that father, Julia, Walter, and Eva are disgraced, for that never will, never can be!"

"Father! she repeated. Ah, Uncle John, that is the most intolerable thought of all! It was a crushing blow to him; he could have borne anything else better. Never, never while I live can I forget the tone of mingled sorrow and bitterness with which, as he threw the fatal newspaper to me, he repeated the word 'disgrace! disgrace!'"

"Yes, Julia, he is like you, and this thing will prey upon him more than it ought to do. Daughter," he added, suddenly, "do you regret having spoken to me upon this subject? Do you think that it was overstepping the bounds of friendship for me to have, as it were, extorted this confidence?"

"By no means, Uncle John. On the contrary, I thank you for having done so, for indeed I have sorely felt the need of sympathy. I never could have persuaded myself to speak to you voluntarily upon such a subject, and yet I thank you more than I can tell for your words of kindness and advice."

"Well, my daughter, if it has been acceptable to you, perhaps it might be to your father also. Suppose that I talk to him freely as I have done to you, and give him the opportunity which, like you, he will never seek himself, of unburdening his heart to his old friend."

"No, Uncle John," she answered, sadly, "it is best not. Papa's is a proud spirit; and while he would appreciate and value your sympathy, it would yet be more than counterbalanced by the galling thought of its cause. If anybody could speak to papa, I could; and yet, although I have carefully watched my opportunity, I have never yet seen him when I thought that an allusion to our common sorrow would be anything but an aggravation of its bitterness. Poor papa! It is a grievous burden, but he prefers to bear it alone."

They now returned home; and as they walked along, Uncle John saw Julia quietly withdraw the piece of newspaper from her bosom and tear it into fragments, which she dropped at intervals along the path. She made no allusion to the act, but said:

"I will try, Uncle John, and get rid of these notions and feelings if they are wrong, but I am afraid that it will take me some time to do it, for you know that when feelings or principles once get a firm foothold in my heart they are very difficult to eradicate. It is this which makes me think earnestly before adopting

an opinion, for if I do not succeed in getting the right one at first, it is a hard matter to root it out and supplant it with another."

"It is this thoughtfulness and anxiety to find out the right which make not only a beautiful, but a most important compensation in your character, Julia. If your judgments were as rash and headlong as your notions and feelings are strongly rooted, the result would be a self-opiniated obstinacy as ruinous as it is unlovely; but as it is, your thoughtfulness makes your decisions generally correct, and when they are not, your anxiety to do right makes you willing at any cost to alter them."

When they reached the gate, Eva came running down the lawn to meet them.

"What a long secret you must have had to tell, Uncle John!" she exclaimed. "I did not know that an old man like you had any secrets. I thought that you had long ago left them to the young and romantic."

"Not by any means, Eva. When I make you my confidante, you will find that even old Uncle John can have secrets as well as any sentimental lassie or boy-beau of your acquaintance."

"I am afraid, sir, that I can never aspire to the honor of being your confidante, for I am neither thoughtful nor prudent nor womanly enough; you require sister for that."

"I have required her this time, Eva, but it does not follow that next time I will not demand you. But see, it is almost dark; go quickly and order my horse. I ought to have been at home by this time."

"No, Uncle John, not yet; not until after tea. We cannot let you go yet."

Julia warmly echoed the negative, and Uncle John consented to stay.

"I must go soon after tea, girls," he said, "for I promised to see Agnes to-day. She was asleep when I was there this morning, and I cannot go all day without seeing her."

Julia was more like her former self than she had been all day, and Uncle John hoped that his words of advice and reproof had already produced some effect. When he was going away, he found opportunity to say:

"Think, daughter, of what I have said to you. I do not ask you to accept it unconditionally as right, but to think of it, and see if your own judgment does not indorse it."

On his way home he stopped at the cottage. Agnes was playing as usual, but there was no light in the parlor. Her mother was sitting by the window, in the moonlight, with her head lean-

ing upon her hand. She quickly detected his step upon the pavement, and as he reached the door he heard the quiet foot-fall, and saw the flutter of her dress as she hastily left the parlor. He went in, but before he had time to speak, the glad arms were stretched out to welcome him, and Agnes said :

"I am so glad to see you, Uncle John ! It is so strange to be all day long without having seen you. I have missed you very much, even though I have been with mother."

"I did not expect, Agnes, that you would think of me once to-day. I thought that mother, organ, home, would quite fill up your heart at present, and that there would be no room just now for me."

"There will always be room for you, Uncle John, and your place there nobody else shall ever fill."

"Are you glad to be at home, daughter ? Is it the same old home to you ?"

"Oh, yes, sir ! the same dear old home, and the same dear old organ, but——"

"But what, Agnes ?"

"But I cannot make it sound like the Fribourg organ. I have been thinking all the way home how beautifully I could play now, for now I know what real organ music is ; but, Uncle John, it is no use to try ; I cannot do it."

"I should think not," he answered, laughing. "Why, Agnes, you are the most ambitious young performer that I ever knew. You really did not expect, child, to equal that performance, in which both organ and organist are the wonder and admiration of a continent, did you ?"

"I don't know that I expected it, Uncle John ; I only hoped that I would be able to make such music as he did, for then I should be so very, very happy."

She was sitting in the shadow, so that he could not see her face, but he detected disappointment in her voice, and he said :

"Agnes, this will not do ; it is wrong. I took you to Fribourg to give you pleasure, and that I thought you would both enjoy at the time and remember gratefully all your life. If, on the contrary, it makes you dissatisfied with your own organ and your own music, I shall always regret that you went there. Turn round now upon your seat and play for me ; I want to see if you have forgotten how to make the sweet music that I used to love before we went away."

She played for him, and afterward he thanked her, saying :

"I am more easily satisfied and more grateful than you are, Agnes, nor has the wonderful music of the Fribourg organ spoiled me. To my ear and heart you play just as sweetly as

ever, and from you and your organ I expect to derive much pleasure and comfort in my lonely life."

"Are you lonely, Uncle John?" she inquired.

"Yes, my daughter, very! You don't know how much I miss you, especially at the table. It looks very solitary without you and Dr. Charles."

"You miss me, Uncle John, and I miss you. Wouldn't it be better for us all to live together? Why can't we do it?" she asked, innocently.

Uncle John heaved a sigh, and answered:

"That cannot be, my daughter. We must be contented to live as we are, only I expect to come every day, and perhaps oftener if I am very lonely, to listen to your music. You will always be willing to play for me, my daughter, won't you?"

"Not willing only, but glad, very glad, Uncle John, to do something for you. I wish, though, that it could be something else besides playing the organ, for that seems only like pleasing myself."

"So much the better, Agnes, for if it pleases both it will be a double pleasure."

Then he talked to her about the Hall, and her friends, and their anxiety to see her. He lingered a little while after he rose to go, hoping, though he scarcely knew why, that Grace would come back, but she did not, and after awhile he kissed Agnes and went away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE days passed by, and everybody, men, women, and children, talked and thought only of war. The first week in July was gone, and Uncle John was sitting in his library late one afternoon, writing to Charles Beaufort, when a young soldier, in Confederate gray, traveling-bag in hand, opened the gate and walked up to the house. Through the open window he caught a glimpse of the figure sitting at the table, and he paused a moment and looked at it attentively. A light, quick step upon the threshold, followed instantly by a familiar voice, caused the writer to look up, and Uncle John saw Charles Beaufort standing before him.

"Welcome, my dear boy!" he exclaimed, "a thousand times welcome! I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you. My

thoughts were full of you this moment, and I was pleading, with all the eloquence that I could muster, that you would hasten your arrangements and give me as much time as possible before joining the army."

"A very unnecessary pleading, Uncle John. You might have known that it was what I would certainly do, without the asking."

"I am afraid, Charles," he said, still holding his hand, "that I am growing selfish and exacting in my old age. I confess that since I parted with you I have often thought of William Beaufort's home, with its large family circle, and coveted one of the number, and felt not only that he ought to be spared to me, but that I had the best right to him. I have thought, grudgingly, my boy, of your three weeks at home, your few days with me. And now tell me, before you sit down, how long I may have you with me. I don't want to drift quietly along for two or three days, and all at once have you say: 'Uncle John, this is the last dinner or the last tea that we will enjoy together; to-morrow I must go.'"

"I will probably stay—but see, Uncle John, there are ladies coming in! I am covered with dust; which way must I——"

The question and the answer were alike cut short by Eva, who came bounding in, as she always did. She ran into the room, exclaiming:

"Oh, Uncle John, what do you think! sister is going——"

She had almost reached Charles Beaufort before she discovered that there was anybody in the room except Uncle John; then, perceiving a stranger there, she stopped short in the middle of her sentence, and stood confused and silent.

Uncle John at once came to the rescue, and taking her hand, said, smiling:

"Before I think what sister is going to do, let me tell you something. This is Dr. Beaufort, your old acquaintance of the Springs; and this, Charles, is Miss Eva Cameron, your former partner at the bowling-alley, and companion in your mountain rambles."

On the part of the young man there was a quiet and easy recognition; but Eva had been so suddenly and entirely thrown off her guard that she could not readily recover herself, and she shyly and blushing offered her hand. By this time, Julia, who was following quietly and soberly behind, came in. She was no less astonished than her sister to find herself in the presence of a stranger; but a hasty glance satisfied her that he was indeed a stranger, and so, without looking at him, she walked up to Uncle John and greeted him as usual. It was now Charles's turn to

be embarrassed. One of his pleasant anticipations in coming to Hopedale was the renewal of his acquaintance with her, and the scarcely acknowledged hope, that even through her reserved and undemonstrative manner he might still find something to construe into the belief that she was not altogether indifferent to him. In this, their first meeting, there was certainly little to encourage such a hope, for she met him as a stranger. As she came into the room he sprang forward to meet her; but the indifferent glance with which she passed him to speak to Uncle John, checked the advancing footstep and the extended hand, and he stood hesitating and confused. Uncle John took it in at a glance, and hastened to say, as he led Julia up to him:

"Julia, this is Dr. Beaufort."

A slight flush mantled her cheek as she gave him her hand, and said, timidly:

"I owe you an apology, Dr. Beaufort. I did not recognize you when I first came in."

"Am I so much changed in two years, Miss Cameron?"

"No, sir. I should have recognized you at once under other circumstances. The unexpectedness of our meeting and your altered dress must plead my excuse."

The conversation was an effort, for they all felt embarrassed, and the attempt to conceal it was wholly unsuccessful. After a few commonplace remarks, there was an awkward silence, which Uncle John broke by saying, abruptly:

"I must have the answer to my question, Charles, which these girls interrupted. How long are you going to stay with me?"

"I have allowed myself until Monday, sir; but I am almost afraid to linger even so long on the way. All the signs of the times foretell an early engagement, and my duty now is in camp."

"Until Monday!" repeated Uncle John. "This is Thursday evening; that gives me only three days,—a short time, Charles, on the eve of what may be a long separation."

"Yes, sir, so it is, and I would gladly make it longer if I could; but I have been very restless for ten days, and anxious to get on, for I think that every man now ought to be in camp."

"I have nothing to say, Charles, except regret that thus it must be. You are right; your duty now is elsewhere. Where is your company? gone on toward Manassas Junction?"

"My brother has, sir; it went ten days ago. I have no company."

"You have no company!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "I thought that the bargain was that you and I were to equip a company, of which you were to be captain."

"I have relinquished my commission in favor of my brother, and I took the liberty of transferring to him the offer that you made me. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"None in the world; but I must confess that I feel curious to know the cause of this sudden and complete change in your plans. When I parted with you, I thought that your head was full of dreams of military success and promotion. Your uniform is not that of a private; what are you, and why are you not captain?"

"I have accepted the post of regimental surgeon, Uncle John."

"Why did you do it, Charles?"

He hesitated a little, and then answered:

"When I went home, I discussed the matter with my father and mother, and we decided that I would be more useful in the capacity of surgeon than in that of captain. My recent opportunities in Paris have probably fitted me better for that post than many who will occupy it, and it was agreed that there would be a greater dearth of efficient surgeons than of efficient captains."

"But, Charles, I know that you will not be satisfied with this alteration."

"Yes, sir, I will be satisfied, though, if my inclinations alone were to be consulted, it is not what I would prefer. In the first place, I have a natural repugnance to surgery, and my study of it in Paris was rather with the view of having a complete medical education, than with the expectation of practicing that branch of the profession. Cutting and sawing human flesh and bones is extremely repulsive to me, and the skill and beauty of an operation could never compensate me for the wear and tear of feeling necessary to perform it. But, besides this, I had another objection; my present position shuts me out from the gratification of all military ambition. The country-maid, with her milk-pail," he added, smiling, "may have her counterpart even in an army of patriots; and I confess that, before I was even a captain, I had the brightest visions of the stars of a brigadier, nay, even of a major-general. Now I will surrender all such dreams, and be content to be plain surgeon, with no hope of promotion, and no record of gallant deeds and superhuman courage to startle my friends and to gratify myself. However, if I can save the limb of one gallant fellow, or relieve the sufferings of one mangled soldier, perhaps I will feel repaid for the loss of the brigadier's stars. My mother thought I would."

Julia looked up in silence at him, with her face beaming approval in every feature. She was quite unconscious that she did

so, and she blushed crimson as her eye met his. He needed no words to interpret that look of approbation, and the thrill of pleasure with which he read it was already no small compensation for the loss of the coveted stars.

She herself was so confused that the only thing that suggested itself was to effect a speedy retreat, and so she arose to go. Uncle John, seconded by Dr. Beaufort, urged them to stay, and promised to drive them home by moonlight, but Julia would not consent.

As they went out to the carriage, Uncle John drew Eva's arm within his, and whispered :

"What has become of your tongue, Eva? I never knew it to be so long silent before."

"The truth is, Uncle John," she replied, laughing, "that I was struck dumb with amazement when I walked in so unexpectedly upon that nice suit of gray buttoned up to the throat with the brass buttons. I have not recovered from the stupefying effects yet."

"I hope, Miss Cameron," said Dr. Beaufort to Julia, "that you will allow me the privilege of renewing our acquaintance, begun at the Springs. A renewal of those happy days of pleasant society and luxurious idleness will be a pleasant memory to take with me into my life of privation and toil."

She only replied :

"It will give me pleasure to do so, Dr. Beaufort."

"Then you will allow me to come and see you. It will be pleasant for us—pleasant for me, I mean, to recall with you the days of happiness."

She answered truthfully and involuntarily :

"It will be pleasant to both, sir."

A moment afterward, how gladly she would have recalled her words, as the thought of her brother rushed upon her mind. She could not speak another word. Her face and neck were instantly dyed with a deep blush, and he could only wonder in silence what there was in his words or her own to embarrass her so painfully.

He thanked her for the permission which she had implied rather than given, and promised to avail himself of it the next day.

They got into the carriage, and as soon as they had driven off, Julia was aroused by Eva's exclamation :

"I declare, sister, that you are the most provoking person that I ever saw in my life! Why on earth didn't you stay to tea, as you were asked to do? I was just getting over my confusion and becoming myself again, and we could have had a nice even-

ing with our old acquaintance of the Springs, and a Confederate officer besides. Why didn't you stay?"

"Papa would not have known where we were, Eva, and might have been anxious about us," she answered, evasively.

"That excuse won't do; it is manufactured for the occasion. Papa might perhaps be anxious about me, the hair-brained scapegrace of the family, but he knows full well that if I am in your keeping, I am both safe and in a proper place. So try again, sister; why wouldn't you stay?"

"Because I thought it would be better to come away."

"Which means that you thought it would be more proper. Your propriety will be the death of me yet, sister," she said, laughing.

Julia could not help laughing too, as she answered:

"And yet, Eva, my propriety is generally with you an inference rather than the result of my words and actions. I have not said that I thought it was proper to come away, and would have been improper to stay, have I?"

"No, not in so many words, but I know well enough that this is what you meant. For my part, I cannot see that there would have been the slightest objection to our having remained. I am very sure that if papa had been there he would have stayed."

"That would have altered the case, Eva. I think that we did right, and that if you ask papa he will say so."

"Of course he will, for you know that he and Uncle John are leagued together to indorse your decision in everything."

"No, not when that decision is wrong. You would do them great injustice if you really thought so, but you do not believe any such thing. You are only talking now."

"I am only wishing," she said, wearily, "that I could have spent a cheerful, pleasant evening with Uncle John and Dr. Beaufort. It is so lonely at the Hall now. Papa is sad, and Walter is gone, and you are more sober than you used to be. Only Carlo and Dixie and I are unchanged. Even Rebel has lost his spirits. You keep him shut up so much now, and never ride him, so that, like yourself, he too begins to look depressed."

"Yes," answered Julia, sadly, "it is not so bright and cheerful as it once was; but for all that, Eva, it is home still. I only wish that we may always have it."

"A very unnecessary wish, sister. Of course we will always have it, until we choose to take another. Some of these days, when we are married and gone, won't the old Hall be lonely then?"

"Whenever that catastrophe happens to you, Eva," she replied, with a sad smile, "it will be lonely enough for papa and

me, for we shall sorely miss your ringing laugh and cheerful voice; but as far as regards myself, I never expect to have any other home. I expect to live and die at the old Hall."

"You would expect, then, to reverse the usual order of things. Gentlemen generally take their wives to their homes, instead of allowing themselves to be taken to those of their wives."

"But suppose that I am not any wife at all, Eva? Suppose that I live and die at the Hall as plain Julia Cameron?"

"Oh, sister," she exclaimed, "anything else but that! Whatever else you may be, don't be an old maid. You are a very tolerable sister just now, and papa and Walter and I cannot get along at all without you; but, indeed, I do think that old Cameron Hall, made quieter than ever by having, for its presiding genius, prim, stiff, starched Miss Julia Cameron, aged fifty, would be absolutely unbearable. Oh no, sister, I cannot stand that!"

"You have drawn a melancholy picture, Eva," answered Julia, smiling; "but, distasteful as it is, I am afraid that it will be your doom to endure the reality."

"You are surely not in earnest, sister?"

"Yes, Eva, quite in earnest. I expect to be an old maid, but I shall try very hard not to be the dried-up hideous skeleton that your fancy has pictured. I am going to try to be genial and pleasant and unselfish, making myself useful and necessary to the comfort of others, and striving to keep out of everybody's way."

"But, sister, what made you resolve to be an old maid?"

"I have made no resolution upon the subject, for I think this is unwise, and such resolutions are more frequently broken than kept. I only think it probable."

"But why do you think it probable, sister?" persisted Eva. "I know one thing, and that is, that if you never marry, somebody will lose one of the best wives in the world."

Julia smiled a sad smile, and sighed. The old morbid feeling was still there. Uncle John's reasoning, although it might be indorsed by her own sober judgment, had not yet been able to eradicate these torturing fancies; and Eva's conversation, which she designed for amusement, was in reality anything else to Julia. She thought of the kind of man who could make her happy, who could sway with entire control the deepest affections of her heart. She thought of her ideal, noble, high-toned, the soul of honor, a *true man*, and the sigh was drawn forth by the thought that such a one could never consent to link his destiny with George Cameron's sister.

Again the pertinacious "Why?" was repeated, and again she sighed and thought, but answered nothing. Presently, with an effort, she aroused herself, and said with forced cheerfulness:

"Never mind, Eva. This may be only an idle fancy of mine, after all. Perhaps you may yet see me one of these days a plump, practical, good-natured Mrs. Somebody, who has the freshest butter, and the fattest chickens, and the earliest vegetables in all the country, and who, when her romantic sister visits her, will take it for granted that she needs something more substantial than moonlight and sentiment to sustain her, and will accordingly feed her upon the richest dainties."

"I declare," said Eva, "it would be too bad for you to persist in being an old maid. You are already a good housekeeper; think what a splendid one you will be when you get to be forty years old!"

"Why, Eva, surely that is not you who are talking now! That is being more matter-of-fact than even myself. Even I, practical as I am, do not think that, to be a good wife, a woman needs only to be a good housekeeper."

"No, not exactly, sister; and yet I am only echoing the sentiment of my teacher. You yourself have taught me, and papa and Uncle John have asserted, that sentiment and romance and high-strung fancies will not make home happy; but it needs, as well, tidy rooms, comfortable fires, warm slippers, and, above all, that nameless air of peace and serenity which belongs alike to the word and the reality of home, and without which it never can be home at all."

"You are right, now, Eva; you have drawn now a true picture of home; and while I think that the housekeeping department is neither the whole nor the most important part of home, yet I believe that it is a necessary element, without which it is radically and hopelessly defective. Loving words and protestations of affection, which cost nothing more than the breath which utters them, can never be considered by a husband an equivalent for that thoughtful care which provides for his comfort in little things, which never loses sight of his wishes and tastes, and shows affection by making his home a pleasant, sheltering refuge from the cares and perplexities and wearing friction of his contest with the world."

When they reached home, Eva told her father of their unexpected meeting with their former acquaintance, his handsome appearance and soldierly bearing, and concluded with a general eulogium upon the Confederate uniform.

Time was when he would have shown himself interested, and would have asked many questions; but of late he had generally listened to her gay chatting in silence, and she was now growing accustomed to it. When she had quite finished, and paused, as if for a reply, or for some recognition that she had been talking,

Mr. Cameron felt constrained to say something, and merely asked :

"How long will Dr. Beaufort stay with Uncle John, Eva?"

"Until Monday, papa. Won't you be glad to see him? You used to like him so much at the Springs."

"Yes—no—" he replied, and added, sadly and moodily, "I don't care to see anybody now."

To his younger daughter this was inexplicable, but Julia understood it all. From the stand-point of her youth and inexperience, and with the buoyant temperament which readily rebounded from every kind of sorrow, Eva had, from the first, heard of her brother's disgrace as she would of a stranger's. She did not recollect him, had never regarded him as a brother, indeed, had very rarely ever thought of him at all; and after the first surprise that any man could so dishonor the name of Cameron, she had dismissed the subject from her thoughts as a matter with which she had, personally, no concern. She saw that her father was unhappy, and wondered that he should allow himself to be made so by the conduct of a son who was such only in name; at times she fancied that she saw in her sister a wearied, careworn expression that she did not have before, but she could not believe that her happiness could be so marred by the thought of a brother who was a stranger to her, and she wondered what could be the matter with her. The name of George had never been mentioned since that morning, and she would again by this time have quite forgotten his existence, if the sight of her father's depression had not constantly reminded her of its cause.

She looked up at him now in surprise, for she could not understand his indifference, nay, more, his repugnance to meeting one whom he had always liked, and whose society he had once so much enjoyed. With that accustomed freedom which was her acknowledged prerogative, she was just about to remark upon the change which had come over him, but there was something in his expression which seemed to forbid it, and the conversation ceased.

As Uncle John and Charles returned to the house after the girls had driven off, the latter remarked :

"It was more than I bargained for, Uncle John, to see so much company so soon. I had forgotten what a favorite you were among the young ladies, and how unceremoniously they visited you, or I never should have presented myself in your house in this plight. I was taken completely at disadvantage."

"You were not alone in that, Charles; indeed, I don't think I ever saw a more embarrassed trio. I watched you all in quiet

amusement. Eva was confused at her abrupt entrée, you at Julia's non-recognition, and she at what she thought would be construed into incivility, at least, if not positive rudeness. None of you recovered your ease and self-possession during the visit."

"I cannot speak for the others, sir, but I know that I did not."

"Then, since you were all so embarrassed, perhaps it is not fair to ask what you thought of the girls; are they much changed?"

"The elder one not at all; the younger has grown somewhat, and is in figure more mature and better developed, but her face is very little altered."

"You find Julia as quiet and undemonstrative as ever, I suppose?"

"Quiet, yes, sir; but undemonstrative, by Jove, no! The moment she entered the room I recognized her; but when I saw her walk up to you and receive a kiss so naturally and so much as a matter of course, I positively rubbed my eyes and looked again, satisfied that it was, and yet that it could not be Julia Cameron. It was what I would have expected from her sister, but from herself, never!"

"So much for being a sober, staid, confirmed old bachelor, my boy! With Uncle John, she is as free and unreserved as with her father; and because she is undemonstrative to the world at large, the few whom she does admit into the depths of her affection can find out what it is fully worth. Uncle John is one of those privileged few; don't you envy him, Charles?"

"Come, Uncle John," he replied, laughing, "don't try to make me discontented and envious the moment that I come under your roof. Let me be as happy as possible during the brief time that I am with you; and by way of taking the first step toward making me comfortable, do take me somewhere to get rid of this superfluous dust before I am caught again."

"That is the disadvantage and discomfort, Charles, of visiting an old bachelor. Now the forethought of woman would have had all that provided for long ago, and immediately upon your arrival you would have been ushered into a room where water in any quantity, toilet soap, and plenty of towels would have furnished the means of relieving yourself of any amount of dust. As it is, I have never thought of it until this minute, and should not have done so then, if you had not reminded me. Hallo, Tom!" he shouted, as he saw the servant crossing the yard. "Come here!"

Tom obeyed, and received his master's orders, and as he turned to go away, Uncle John called out:

"Be sure to have plenty of water, Tom! The doctor says that he is very dusty! Now, Charles," he added, "let me tell you, in the beginning, that you must make yourself at home and provide for your own comfort. Don't depend upon me. I am so accustomed to think only of myself that I am afraid you will be neglected. A solitary life has made me selfish."

"That, Uncle John, I positively deny, upon the evidence of my own senses. A habitually selfish man could never have so forgotten himself and merged his own wishes in those of another, as I saw you do in Paris. No, sir, selfishness is not one of your faults."

"That case was peculiar, Charles, and would have overcome, for the time being, the most confirmed selfishness."

"How is Agnes, sir?"

"Not quite so strong and rosy as when you parted from her. She sits at the organ too much."

"Absence, then, did not wean her from it."

"On the contrary, she is, if possible, more devoted to it than ever. I used to think that it was the pleasure of her life; now it seems to be her very life itself. But here is Tom, come to say that your room is ready. Go along and get rid of your troublesome dust. Meanwhile I will go and bring Agnes, and you shall see her for yourself, and we three will have one of our Paris meals together."

Agnes and her mother were sitting upon the porch enjoying the cool breeze of approaching twilight. The child had a bouquet in her hands, and was tracing the form, and feeling the texture of the flowers, as her mother told her the name of each. It was an unsatisfactory task to both, and at last Agnes laid them down, wearily, saying:

"It is no use, mother. I cannot, without eyes, know what a flower is."

Just then Uncle John reached the pavement in front of the gate. She heard his step, and exclaimed, gladly:

"But I can hear, if I cannot see, and I know that Uncle John is coming!"

"Not coming, Agnes, but already here," he replied, stepping upon the porch.

Grace received him as usual. Their intercourse of late had not been quite what it had always been, for neither could altogether conceal the recollection of their painful interview; but with wonderful self-control neither had ever made the slightest allusion to it.

"You have come to stay, Uncle John, haven't you?" she asked, seeing that he did not sit down as usual.

"No, Grace, not this evening. I have come to borrow Agnes for a little while. I want her to take tea with me, and will promise to bring her home safely and in good season. Will you go, Agnes?"

"I would like to go very much, Uncle John, but then, if I do, mother will be left by herself."

"Never mind that, Agnes," said her mother. "I stayed so much by myself while you were gone, that I became quite accustomed to it. I would much rather that you should go. I will get your bonnet."

She went into the house to get the bonnet, and Uncle John followed her.

"Charles Beaufort came most unexpectedly this afternoon," he said, "the Dr. Charles that you have heard her talk so much about, and I want him to see her. I would not tell her, because I want to enjoy her surprise when she hears his voice."

"Oh, then, Uncle John, you must wait a few minutes until I change her dress. I did not know that you had company."

"Mother's vanity, Grace," said Uncle John, smiling; "but have your own way, I will wait."

A few minutes were sufficient to complete the child's simple toilet, and yet it was as carefully arranged as if she herself could have been gratified by the result. As her mother led her back and she stood before Uncle John, her white muslin dress falling in soft folds about her slight figure, her brown hair parted smoothly from her forehead, and her face lighted up with the pleasure of going home with him, he thought that he had rarely seen a sweeter picture of childish loveliness.

So, too, thought Charles Beaufort, as he saw them approaching the house, and walked toward the gate to meet them. A significant gesture from Uncle John was readily interpreted; and, approaching unannounced, he said, in a low tone, as he reached her side:

"Agnes!"

"Oh, Dr. Charles!" she exclaimed, joyfully, "how glad I am to see you! When did you come? Uncle John, why didn't you tell me that I was going to see him?"

"Because I wanted to give you a pleasant surprise, Agnes. It seems like old times, for us three to be together, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir; only it is a great deal pleasanter to be together here than so far away from home. Will you stay a long time with us, Dr. Charles?"

"Not very long, Agnes; not more than three days."

"Why not?" she asked, in a disappointed tone.

"Because I cannot now do what I would like to do. I belong to the army, now, and my place and business are there."

"How I wish that there wasn't any war!" she exclaimed. "It interferes with everybody's pleasure. Uncle John, what made the people have a war?"

"That, my daughter, is beyond the comprehension of older and wiser heads than yours."

"I can tell you, Agnes," said Charles, "why the people have a war, but I don't know that you will understand it. It is simply because a Yankee can never be contented to let well enough alone, and there is nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, with which he can be entirely satisfied unless he has had a finger in the arrangement."

"I don't think, Charles," said Uncle John, laughing, "that she is much wiser now than she was before."

She held Charles's hand, and touched the buttons upon his sleeve.

"What makes you wear buttons upon your sleeve, Dr. Charles?" she asked. "Was that the fashion in Paris? I don't think that you wore them there."

"No, Agnes, it is not the Paris, but the military fashion."

"Are you a general?"

"No, only a doctor,—plain Dr. Charles, as I have always been."

"I am so glad to hear that. All that you will have to do will be to attend to the sick and wounded soldiers; you won't have to fight, and be shot, and perhaps killed."

"No, I will not have to fight; but it does not follow that I may not die of disease, or even be killed. Do you know that disease kills more soldiers than cannon balls do?"

"No, sir; I thought the only danger was of being shot. You won't have to be shot, will you?"

"No," he answered, smiling, "not necessarily, although a stray ball might perhaps reach me."

"But if I were you I would stay out of the reach of all balls and shots. If you don't have to go into the fight, you can find a safe place to stay until it is over."

"I cannot choose my place, Agnes. I must go where I can be most useful to the wounded soldiers as they are brought from the field, and there is no place near a battle-field that can be considered perfectly safe. Besides, you would not want me to be thinking only of myself, would you? If that is what I am going to do, I ought to have stayed at home. I know that you would want me to do my duty."

"Yes, sir; but I would rather that you should do it in a safe place."

"So would we all," he answered, laughing; "but soldiers must

learn not to think about that. With them, duty must be first, and safety afterwards."

"I am very sorry, Dr. Charles, that you, too, have been obliged to join the army. Now I shall have two to be anxious about: you and Mr. Walter."

"I was not obliged to do it, Agnes, I did it voluntarily. Would you be willing for me to stay at home and let other young men fight my battles?"

"No, sir," she answered, sadly, and with hesitation; "but I wish that nobody had any battles to fight. I wish that there wasn't any war."

"We all wish that, child," said Charles, musingly; "and we will wish it more profoundly than we do now before we get through with it."

"Come, Charles," exclaimed Uncle John, "how upon earth did you and Agnes fall into so dolorous a strain of conversation? This will not do. We three travelers, at this, our first reunion, ought to have pleasanter themes than these. But come, tea is ready; I see Alfred coming to announce it."

It seemed, indeed, like old times, the three at the little round table, with Uncle John pouring out tea, Agnes at his right, and Charles opposite.

"This seems like Paris, doesn't it, my daughter?" said Uncle John.

"No, sir. There is a home-feeling here which there never was in Paris."

"That is true, child. That one word fully describes the difference."

The conversation now took a pleasant turn. The war was forgotten by the child, and avoided by her companions, and they dwelt upon the pleasures that they had enjoyed together in the Old World. The Fribourg organ was mentioned, and at the magic word the last lingering shade was dispelled from the childish face and heart, and next to hearing it again was the pleasure of talking about it with those who had enjoyed it with her.

The evening was quite too short for Agnes, and her friends enjoyed it not less than herself. Theirs was not merely a reflected pleasure, a compensation, in her evident enjoyment; for, whatever pains they might have taken to adapt their conversation to her understanding, in her both Uncle John and Charles had always found an interesting companion. There was no unnatural precocity about her. She was a thorough child, and, because of her infirmity, knew less than most children of her age, and yet there was a maturity of thought and feeling about her, consequent upon her association always with older persons, which made

her appear much older than she really was, and disposed her friends to regard her rather as a companion than a child. And so it was to-night. The evening slipped away as pleasantly to them as it did to her, and when Uncle John after awhile remembered to look at his watch, he exclaimed :

"Nearly eleven o'clock ! I have not kept my promise to your mother, Agnes. I told her that I would bring you home at your usual bedtime. Come, you must go this very minute."

"Not yet, Uncle John ! please let me stay a little longer !"

"Not another moment. You ought to have been in bed an hour ago ; so bid Dr. Charles good-night, and let us go."

"Dr. Charles," she said, "please come along and walk with us ; you are not too tired, are you ?"

"By no means, Agnes. A soldier must not confess that he is tired from traveling a day and two nights in a railroad car. I will go with you with pleasure."

When they reached the gate, she said :

"Dr. Charles, I want you to come in for a little while. I want you to hear my beautiful organ."

She never wanted any one to hear her play, for she was quite unconscious that any remarkable skill of her own had aught to do with the result which so delighted her ; she rather regarded the music as a peculiar favor which the instrument conferred upon her in consideration of her blindness.

"Positively, no," answered Uncle John ; "it is too late, altogether too late ! Go to bed now, Agnes, and he shall come to-morrow, and you shall play for him then."

"But I want him now," she persisted, for she was not accustomed to denial.

Charles seconded her request.

"Only for a little while, Uncle John. It is night, and music sounds so much sweeter at night, and, above all, it is glorious moonlight. Let her play, Uncle John, please do."

Overcome, as usual, he said pleasantly, as he opened the gate :

"Come along, you two willful children, and have your own way ; but old Uncle John knows that it is not right. She ought to be in bed."

"Dr. Charles," said Agnes, "did you say that music always sounds sweeter at night ?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then," she said, thoughtfully, "that is the reason why it sounds sweeter to me than to anybody else."

"How so, Agnes ?"

"It is always night to me, Dr. Charles !"

Grace was sitting in the porch awaiting Agnes's return. She welcomed cordially the friend to whom her child was so much attached. He apologized for the lateness of the hour, but pleaded his anxiety to hear Agnes play. Grace arose to bring candles, as she said, into the parlor, but Uncle John and Charles both objected. They said that Agnes needed no light, and that they preferred the moonlight.

"Dr. Charles," said Agnes, "do you love the moonlight very much?"

"Yes, Agnes; there are few things in this world so beautiful as a moonlight night; and a man who can stand and look upon a landscape softened and subdued by the moonlight, and not feel its influence upon his soul, is no man at all."

"Which do you love best, moonlight or sunlight?"

"Moonlight is most beautiful, Agnes; sunlight most necessary. Moonlight is soft, subdued, quiet; sunlight is bright, sparkling, restless."

"I don't understand you, Dr. Charles, she said, shaking her head sadly. "You say that moonlight is soft,—I know what that is, for I have touched soft things; but subdued,—I don't know what that means. Mother, you tell me what moonlight is. Dr. Charles loves it so much that I want to know what it is, and then perhaps I can play it for him on my organ, just like the musician in Fribourg played the storm, the thunder, the lightning, and the wind."

Grace drew the child toward her, and taking her hand, said:

"Agnes, did you feel very glad to-night, when you saw Dr. Charles?"

"Oh, mother, just as glad as I could be! If I had only had eyes, I should have run and shouted and capered all over Uncle John's yard."

"That, my daughter, was sunlight: bright and glad and happy!"

"Now, when I read to you this morning about heaven,—no night, no tears, no death, but eternal life, eternal bliss, eternal song,—did you feel like shouting in mirth and glee then, my daughter?"

"Oh, no, mother!" she replied, earnestly and solemnly, "not that! I felt very glad, but very still; very happy, but very quiet."

"That, Agnes, is moonlight: serene, peaceful, beautiful!"

"Oh, mother!" she exclaimed, with delight, "now I know all about it! Now I can play sunlight and moonlight too!"

In her anxiety to convey her ideas clearly to her little listener, the mother had forgotten the presence of others, who, unac-

customed to such methods of instruction, had heard in silent surprise.

They were aroused from their reverie by the bright, glad music which rippled and sparkled beneath her touch, and lighted up the heart with its glad exhilaration, as the sunshine does the world. Presently it died away; and then a soft and subdued strain trembled upon the air, and lingered upon the ear. Pure and silvery in its tones, as the moonlight in its beauty, it left upon the heart, as the moonlight does upon the landscape, a peaceful, quiet serenity, almost heavenly in its repose.

Uncle John, accustomed as he was to her music, was scarcely less amazed than his companion. Neither moved nor spoke, until the childish voice at their side said :

“Dr. Charles, did you know what I was playing?”

“I could not mistake it, Agnes; only your music was sweeter than moonlight, brighter than sunshine. Wonderful, wonderful!” he murmured.

When they arose to go, Uncle John said :

“Grace, I have an odd sort of whim, which I would like for you and Agnes to gratify. I want Agnes at all our meals while Charles stays with me; it seems so natural for us three to be at the table together. I will come for her, and bring her back. What do you say? Will you lend her to us at meal-time for the next three days?”

“With pleasure, Uncle John?”

“And what do you say, Agnes?”

“Oh, Uncle John, I shall be so glad to go!”

“Very well, it is a bargain. I will come for you in the morning, before breakfast.”

Accordingly, the next day, she breakfasted and dined with her friends; and when they drove out to the Hall, in the afternoon, Uncle John placed a little stool in the bottom of the buggy for her, and she accompanied them.

To this promised visit Eva had looked forward all day with the greatest pleasure. There was still about her much of that childish *abandon* which Dr. Beaufort had thought so attractive two years before, and which had led him to believe that she was even then more of a child than she really was. She still looked upon him as greatly her superior in age, not realizing that in those two years she had made a bound toward womanhood which made her very much nearer his equal now than she was then. She was quite unconscious that a degree of reserve, such as she had never thought of before, would now be becoming in her intercourse with him, and she did not dream that anybody could find fault with her, when, seeing the buggy far up the road, she

bounded out of the house and ran down the lawn to open the gate. Uncle John drew up his horse and stopped to speak to her, and when she welcomed the stranger with the same unaffected pleasure that she did himself, there was such a childlike ease and naturalness about it all, that her guests, like herself, quite forgot that there was anything in her conduct of which the most rigid propriety could complain.

Charles sprang from the buggy, and insisted that she should take his seat; but she shook her head, and said, laughing:

"No, indeed, I cannot think of going back at that gait! I'll wager that I can get there now sooner than any of you who go behind Uncle John's old horse, even at his briskest trot!"

"See here, children," said Uncle John, "Agnes and I are quietly awaiting your decision. Which of you is to ride with us to the house?"

"Neither, sir," replied Charles. "Miss Eva positively refuses, and I am sure you will not quarrel with me for preferring her company to yours, as far as the house."

"All right, my boy!"

With the tap of the whip they drove off, and Uncle John and Agnes had been seated in the parlor several minutes, when Charles and Eva slowly sauntered in, the former with a handful of flowers, which, together, they had plucked as they strolled along.

Julia had, by no means, looked forward to this visit with the same pleasure as Eva. On the contrary, she had dreaded it, and wished that she might be spared the trial. Under other circumstances, she would gladly have met her old acquaintance; and even now, if she could have met him as a friend, she would not have objected, but her own heart had told her long ago that this was impossible. She had then determined that if they ever met again, it should be as strangers; but a single effort had proved that this could not be, for it was very evident that he himself would not allow it. After she parted with him at Uncle John's, she had thought long and earnestly of their present relation to each other. Even in their short interview, formal and embarrassed though it was, there had been something in his tone and look which she could not but feel and understand; and the thrill of pleasure with which she saw it had involuntarily betrayed itself in the few words that she had spoken, simple enough themselves, and scarcely as much as the occasion required, and yet she would not have spoken them if she could have thought a moment. And as she reflected upon it, she decided that all that was now left her to do was to repair her error as best she could. She had tried to meet him as a stranger, and had failed; she

would try now and meet him as a friend. She knew that it would be a very great effort, and she was afraid it would be impossible, but she was determined to try. She would treat him so unmistakably as a friend, that he should see that she so regarded him now, and that this was all that he could ever be. But Julia had over-estimated her self-control. She felt it the moment that he entered the room and took her hand, and she knew that she must at once decide between absolute frigidity and the cordiality which, under the circumstances, it was not right to show. And therefore she met him coldly, so coldly that he was chilled to the heart, especially after Eva's unaffectedly cordial welcome. He felt that it was more than her usually cold, quiet manner; it was more than embarrassment; and between her reception of him to-day at her own house, and her unexpected meeting with him the day before, there was an inconsistency which he could not explain. She had been evidently embarrassed then, unaccountably so; but at the same time, through it all, he had detected a pleasure at meeting him again which she could not conceal, and which had made him look forward to this visit with hope and eagerness; but now this was all gone. His presence seemed not only a restraint, but a painful one.

If anything, however, could have compensated him for Julia's cold reception, he would have found it in his welcome from the other members of the family. There was neither coldness nor reserve with Eva; and as to Mr. Cameron, he had not been, for months, so like his former self. He and Charles had been, notwithstanding the difference in their ages, much together at the Springs. Their tastes were congenial: they loved the woods and the pleasures of hunting and fishing, and as they found themselves there early in the season, when there were but few visitors, they had formed a friendship which satisfied both, after they each had access to companions nearer their own age. And although in the morbidness of his feelings Mr. Cameron had expressed to Eva an indifference, if not a positive reluctance to renewing his acquaintance with his young friend, yet, now that he had met him again, frank, cordial, and genial as ever, his moodiness and sadness were dispelled, and he was, for the time being, almost his former self.

The conversation was so general and animated, that Julia hoped that her silence would pass unnoticed, but in this she was mistaken. One guest felt it, and the other saw it, for Uncle John knew too well every expression of her face to be deceived when anything weighed upon her spirits.

Charles waited in vain for her to mingle in the conversation, and finally determined, by a direct effort, either to dispel the

shadow or to deepen it. Taking a vacant chair by her side, he said :

"Miss Cameron, will you oblige me by arranging these flowers into a bouquet? They are individually beautiful, but I have mixed them up in such confusion that their beauty is comparatively lost."

She took the flowers and began to arrange them. As one after another was added according as her taste directed, and the bouquet grew into beautiful symmetry, Charles looked admiringly at it, and said :

"Isn't it strange, Uncle John, that the very same elements of beauty should present, under different combinations, such different results? These flowers were just now literally a bunch, their beauty almost entirely lost in the want of arrangement; now they are growing into a beautiful bouquet of fair proportions, and with colors harmoniously blended."

"Yes, Charles," he answered; "our sex may love and admire flowers, but we do not often know how to arrange them. I know," he added, laughing, "that if Julia could see the vases that you dressed this morning, she would have pity alike upon you and upon my parlor, and do it over for us."

"No she wouldn't, Uncle John!" exclaimed Eva, her eyes full of mischief. "She would not pity him at all, nor would she arrange his vases for him; for I asked her this morning to help me dress the parlor, and reminded her that Dr. Beaufort was a great lover of flowers, but she would not, and I had it to do all alone. I cannot account for it, for she is not generally so unaccommodating."

Julia blushed deeply, and Charles saw it, but he turned away, and replied to Eva :

"Well, Miss Eva, if I want my vases dressed, I can engage your services."

"Yes, sir, you can command mine at any time. It may be," she added, quite unconscious of the pain she was inflicting, and intent only upon indulging her love of teasing, "that if you make personal application, she may oblige you, as she has done about the bouquet. She may do it for you, when she would not for me."

Poor Julia was painfully embarrassed by Eva's raillery. She tried to hide her confusion over her bouquet, but the more that she felt her crimson face to be the object of remark and wonder, the deeper grew the flush. She bore it as long as she could, and then, murmuring something about getting a ribbon to tie the flowers, she left the room. When she returned, she was quiet and composed as usual, and the conversation had again become

general; and Charles, at a loss to conjecture what it meant, and yet unwilling to do anything to annoy her, did not address himself particularly to her again. When they were going away, Mr. Cameron said:

"Uncle John, I wish that you and the Doctor would come tomorrow and spend a day in the country—an old Virginia day, which means to come early in the morning, and stay until bedtime. I would scarcely think it fair to ask you to surrender him entirely for one whole day, when he has only three to give you; but, inasmuch as you will come along, it will be no great generosity on your part to share his company with us."

"I will very cheerfully do so, sir, and will take the liberty of replying for him, that he will consent as willingly as myself. Is it not so, Charles?"

He could not do otherwise than accept an invitation which in the morning he would have received with great pleasure, but which now he would not unwillingly have declined. He could not refuse, however, and so it was arranged.

"You must bring Agnes, too, Uncle John," said Mr. Cameron, as he led her to the door.

"Certainly, sir," he answered, smiling; "I shall bring all of my family, and she makes one of it while Charles is here. You cannot imagine how completely the addition of two to my household has altered the aspect of my house. It really looks inhabited now. And as to myself, sir, I am quite oppressed with the dignity and responsibility of being at the head of a family."

Julia saw the preparations for departure with relief, and hoped that this day's trial at least was over; but she was both surprised and annoyed when she heard her father say:

"Uncle John, put Jim into your buggy, and let him drive through the grove and wait for you at the other end, and the girls and I will walk that far with you. It is a pleasant evening for a walk."

"Agreed," replied Uncle John. "I like the arrangement."

The party walked along together through the lane, but when they entered the woods, the narrowness of the path compelled them to go in pairs, of which circumstance Charles took advantage to get by the side of Julia. Disappointed in the result of his visit, and annoyed, he scarcely knew wherefore, he determined to find out, if possible, whether his presence had anything to do with her painful embarrassment.

"The purpose of my visit is yet unaccomplished, Miss Cameron," he said. "We have not recalled together any of those pleasant memories of which we spoke yesterday."

"The conversation has been so general," she answered, evasively, "that there has been no opportunity."

"And yet it has not been so general but that your father and sister have both found opportunity to recall scenes and amusements in which we participated together. You alone have been silent; you alone of that party seem to remember nothing of that time with pleasure. I had hoped otherwise, and last night I believed otherwise, after you told me that those memories were pleasant to both."

The word "Forget" trembled upon her lips, but she checked it, and answered quietly:

"I spoke truly, Dr. Beaufort. Those were happy days to me, and their memory may not be the less pleasant because I have not said so."

"You have said so once," he answered, with a hurried tone. "You admitted it yesterday, but to-day there has been neither word nor look to make me believe, not only that you remembered that time with pleasure, but that you even recollected it at all. I wish, Miss Cameron," he added, with a perplexed air, "that I could understand it."

Julia felt that they were approaching dangerous ground, and she would gladly have had a moment to collect her thoughts and reflect upon what she should answer. She was relieved from her dilemma by a voice in front, which called out:

"Come along, Charles, Agnes and I are waiting for you."

Julia, glad to be released, hurried forward without any reply at all, and a few minutes afterward her guests were whirling rapidly along in the distance. On their return, her father and Eva did all the talking. The visit had been like a sunbeam to Mr. Cameron. The revival of past pleasures had, for the time being at least, diverted his thoughts from his present trouble, and Julia felt self-condemned at her own inability to participate in that cheerfulness which she was so truly glad to see in him. But she could not rouse herself; a cloud was upon her face, and a heavy weight was upon her heart, which she felt so helpless to remove that she yielded to the pressure in unresisting submission.

"Uncle John," said Charles, abruptly, as they drove off, "what is the matter with Miss Cameron?"

"Is anything the matter?" he asked in return.

"I should think, sir, that it would be very evident to you, since it is so plain to me, a comparative stranger. This visit, or something else, was so decidedly painful to her, that it was anything but a pleasure to me, and I sincerely regret the necessity of a repetition of it to-morrow."

"Julia has much to bear, for one of her age, Charles. Her

young brother, for whom she feels a mother's rather than a sister's love and anxiety, has recently gone to the army; her father is now depressed and care-worn, and ——" he thought of that other and heaviest burden of them all, but he only shook his head, saying: "There is too much, a great deal too much, upon that young heart!"

"Yes," said Agnes, "Miss Julia has been troubled ever since I came home."

"How do you know, Agnes?" inquired Uncle John, in surprise.

"I know by her voice, Uncle John; it is always sad."

"Her voice never was gay and loud, like Eva's, Agnes."

"I know that, sir. It was never like Eva's, but neither was it like what it is now. She is troubled about something, and I am very sorry. Miss Julia is too good to be troubled."

"But, Uncle John," said Charles, "sadness and trouble will not account for her appearance and manner this evening. She was ill at ease for some reason, and seemed more so whenever I attempted to talk to her; and if I thought that my presence or society had anything to do with her evident discomfort, I would certainly spare her any repetition of it in future."

"Confess, Charles," said Uncle John, laughing, "that your visit has disappointed you. You hoped to have an opportunity for a tête-à-tête, but we were all in your way, and either too stupid to understand your wishes, or too selfish to deny ourselves for their gratification, and now in your vexation you want to throw all the blame upon the lady herself. It is not fair, Charles; she was not to blame."

"I would like to think so, sir, and would gladly believe that she is as disappointed as I confess myself to be; but this is not so. I cannot be mistaken in the evident relief expressed in her face when your summons put a sudden end to the only real conversation that I have had with her this evening."

Uncle John knew that Charles was right. He did not know all, but he very well knew some of the reasons which had influenced her thus to act; but her conduct was susceptible of no explanation to Charles, and so, wishing to divert his thoughts from a subject which evidently annoyed him, Uncle John said, pleasantly:

"Wait until to-morrow, and perhaps the mood will change. '*Varium et mutabile*,' you know, Charles."

"I hoped and believed, sir, that Miss Cameron was one of the exceptions to the poet's rule. I did not know that she was subject to moods."

"Nor is she, Charles. You are right there. If ever you see a cloud upon her face, you may rest assured that there is suffi-

cient cause for it. But, by-the-way," he added, determined now to change the conversation, "before I forget it, let me say that if it ever comes in your way to do anything for Walter Cameron, I specially commend him to you. His regiment belongs to the same brigade as yours, and it is just possible that some time or other you may encounter him and be able to do something for him. If you ever have an opportunity, seek him out. I ask it as a personal favor; you won't forget it, Charles?"

"I will not, sir. If it is possible, I will search him out."

That night, when the rest of the household were all asleep, Julia sat by her window for hours. The few words which Charles had spoken to her in the grove, together with his tone and manner, had assured her what next he would say unless she positively forbade it. She was herself altogether as much dissatisfied with her conduct toward him to-day as he had been, and she now determined to look calmly into her own feelings, bring them under control, and decide how she was to meet him on the morrow. But she found it no easy task. Her heart throbbed fast and painfully. No reasoning with herself, no conviction that thus it must not be, and no determination that thus it should not be, could still its tumultuous beating. For once, her self-control utterly failed her. She sat with her face buried in her hands, and, after vainly trying to think, she at last gave it up, and all that she was conscious of for a long time was the thought that happiness was within her reach but denied to her grasp. She longed wearily and painfully for a mother. She wanted somebody to whom she could unburden herself. There were depths in her nature which her light-hearted sister could not fathom, and Julia knew that Eva would not understand her if she were to lay her heart open to her now. And, besides, she needed not only sympathy, but guidance and counsel as well, and never in all her life before had she thought so yearningly of that mother who was sleeping quietly, all unconscious of her child's necessities and longings.

Then Julia remembered Him who thinks no burden of the human heart too insignificant for His sympathy and help, and no ignorance too great for His enlightenment. She sank upon her knees, and her heart found a voice for its need, and an expression of its wants, in the church's prayer:

"Grant that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same."

Reason and argument had failed to still her heart, but these few simple words of prayer were able to do it. She arose from her knees, and tried once more to think and to resolve, and this

time not in vain. She thought that she saw her duty plainly now, and that it but remained faithfully to do it. She believed not only that it was right, but also her bounden duty, steadfastly to resist all Charles Beaufort's advances. She felt that under existing circumstances she could not marry him, nor did she believe that he would desire it if he knew all. She felt that however her brother might himself have chosen to publish his infamy to the world, yet, as his sister, she could have neither the right nor the desire to do so, and therefore since she could not give Charles a reason for a refusal, it was doubly binding upon her to prevent the necessity of it. Besides, she wanted to spare him the pain of one, and her desire was so to act as to do justice both to herself and him, to exonerate herself from the imputation of heartlessness and capriciousness, and yet to show him plainly that they never could be any more to each other than they were now.

Julia believed that her purposes had so completely failed to-day because she had not had sufficient time for reflection. The whole emergency had been so suddenly precipitated upon her, her meeting with Dr. Beaufort had been so unexpected, and her great grief coming thus into palpable collision with the thought of him, and seeming to sever her from him by such an impassable gulf,—all this had combined so to unnerve her that she had been powerless to act out what she believed to be right. Now, however, she had had time both to think and to resolve, and also to ask for help to do right; and when at last she laid herself down to rest, wearied alike in mind and body with the conflict, she fell asleep with the pleasing belief that to-morrow she should be enabled to meet him calmly, and in all respects to treat him, not as her heart, but as her conscience dictated.

The morrow came. She met Charles as of old, with a quiet smile; but her purpose almost faltered when she felt the unequivocal pressure of the hand with which he greeted her. He looked at her to-day quite as much surprised as he was yesterday. Then, so different from what he had ever seen her before; now, so different from what she was then, she seemed indeed an inexplicable enigma. And, however he might regret to believe that she was not, as he had supposed, an exception to the poet's rule, he nevertheless felt a compensation in the fact that to-day the mood of yesterday had passed away, and she was almost her former self. Quiet, and disposed to be silent as ever, she was nevertheless placid and at ease. He rejoiced in the result, but he little dreamed of the effort that so calm an exterior had cost her. Few others could thus have controlled themselves; but Julia had so accustomed herself to it in smaller matters, that even now, the

attainment, though difficult, was not impossible. She mingled pleasantly in the conversation all day. There was no abstraction, no preoccupation of thought as there had been the day before. She watched strictly and carefully over herself, and only once was for an instant thrown off her guard.

She was talking about Walter, and had requested for him, as Uncle John had done before, Charles's friendship, and care if he should need it.

"It has been already promised to Uncle John," he replied, "but now the promise will be doubly binding; now it will be sacred," he added, in a tone so low that none heard it except herself.

For an instant the old embarrassment threatened to return, as she suddenly remembered that she had asked a favor and thereby accepted an obligation. In a few minutes, however, she recovered herself, and led the conversation into another channel.

And so the day wore away: pleasantly to Eva and her father; regretfully to Uncle John and Charles, as they remembered that two out of the three allotted days were gone; and wearily with Julia, who, though successful in accomplishing her purpose, was nevertheless tired with the effort. She was the only one of the party who saw, without regret, the lengthening shadows of evening, and was pleased when the time of departure came.

When the visit was over, Charles found himself again disappointed in not having enjoyed a single moment's private conversation with Julia, and yet he did not, as before, blame her. She had so effectually and yet so skillfully guarded against it, that while he deplored the fact, he did not dream that she had so decreed and so effected it.

Uncle John was seated in the buggy ready to go. Mr. Cameron stood by, talking to him, and Eva and Julia were on the veranda, the latter leaning against a column, relieved to think that this, her day of greatest trial, was over now. Charles offered his hand, and said:

"I suppose that I shall, of course, meet you ladies at church to-morrow?"

"Certainly," replied Eva, "we always go. Sister would think it a grave misdemeanor, if not a crime, to be absent from church without a very good excuse."

"Not the last, Eva," said Julia, smiling, "but certainly the first."

She forgot herself for the first time during the day, and said, absently:

"Yes, I will certainly be there. I need the church service more than ever, now!"

"Come along, Charles!" said Uncle John. "It matters not how long you stay, you will at last have to tear yourself away, and you might as well do so at once."

Charles looked earnestly in Julia's face, as if he expected there to read what her words meant. His look aroused her, and she turned her face away, but not before he had seen the color mount to her temples. The last thing that Charles saw, as he drove off, was Julia leaning wearily against the column, and he went away with the same thought in his heart which had the day before found utterance in the question: "What is the matter with Miss Cameron?"

If Julia felt the need of the church service, she was not disappointed the next morning in its adaptation to her wants and necessities. There was much in the special service for the day that was suited to her case. In the Collect, the petition for "the Spirit to *think* and *do* always such things as are right," was only the expression of her heart's desire; and when Mr. Derby announced his text, "Take heed unto the thing that is *right*, for that shall bring a man peace at the last," and proceeded to show how an uncompromising effort to know and do the right, unswayed by inclination, undeterred by difficulties, and undismayed by sacrifices, would, in the end, bring a peace which would far more than compensate for the difficulties and trials in the way of its attainment, she was almost tempted to believe that he was preaching specially for her comfort and instruction. She was strengthened and fortified now, and hoped much from the soothing influence of the holy day, and the privacy of her own quiet home, to bring her rest and peace. But the privacy and quiet she was not to enjoy.

After service, nothing would satisfy Uncle John but that they should all go home with him, and enjoy their last dinner with their friend; and Mr. Cameron agreed, on condition that after the evening service they should all adjourn to the Hall.

It seemed that the strength of Julia's resolution was certainly to be tried to the utmost; but all that she could do was patiently to submit, and earnestly to struggle during this the last day.

She was as successful now as she had been before in avoiding all conversation with him alone; and when she found herself, after tea, sitting upon the veranda at home, talking with all the rest in a social circle, and upon common topics, she congratulated herself upon the success of her efforts. But her congratulation was premature, for this time there was opposed to her a determination which nothing could resist.

Charles had, since the day before, been quietly awaiting an opportunity to say to Julia what he had made up his mind to tell

her, but the opportunity was long coming, the hours were rapidly slipping away, and, at last, determined to wait no longer, he went up to Julia and said, with a frankness and directness that admitted of no refusal:

"Miss Cameron, will you oblige me by walking with me a little while upon the lawn? The night is beautiful, and the lawn looks very inviting for a stroll."

She was taken by surprise, but she could not refuse; and the openness of the request would at once have lulled any suspicions that she might have had with regard to his purpose. She complied without an objection, and it was only when she found herself alone with him that she began to fear lest he might be tempted to say something which she would rather not hear; but even then she did not suspect that such was, indeed, his sole purpose and design.

Without introduction or circumlocution, he spoke directly to the point:

"Miss Cameron, Julia, listen to me, and hear me to the end before you answer me. Had I waited for encouragement, or had I been deterred by coldness, this avowal would not have been made, at least not now; but to-morrow I leave you, perhaps forever, and I cannot consent to go until I have told you that I love you, and have loved you for two years."

"Do not, please, do not," she interrupted; but he gently laid his hand upon the arm that rested in his, saying:

"Not yet; hear me first. You prevented me from saying this long ago, but you must listen to it now. My own heart, at least, will be lighter for the confession, even if it should be unwelcome to you. Julia, it is not vanity for me to believe that such love as mine for you ought to and would satisfy you. It is a sincere, honest, manly love, which would value the heart that you would intrust to its keeping as above all price, and would study through life to make you happy; and could you but repay that love by giving me yours in return, you would make me immeasurably happy. Can you, will you do it?"

She did not answer. The arm that rested in his trembled so that he grasped it firmly to support her, and anxiously, but silently, awaited an answer; but none came. Presently, he said:

"Will you not speak, Julia? Just now you needed to restrain your words, and now you refuse them utterance. Can you not tell me something?"

"Oh, Charles—Dr. Beaufort, I mean," she stammered, "indeed, indeed, this must not, this cannot be!"

He waited for something more, but it did not come, and then he asked, sadly:

"Is this all? Must I be content only to know that 'it must not, cannot be?' and will you deny me even the poor comfort of a reason? Tell me something, even if it should be that your heart is not your own to give. If you have already bestowed it upon another, I pray God that he may value the treasure as I would, and guard it as sacredly. Speak, say something; this silence, this suspense is intolerable!"

"All that I can say," she answered, "is, that you must forget this night; forget all that you have said; forget me and all that concerns me."

"By Heaven, Julia!" he exclaimed, "you demand impossibilities. I can neither forget you nor what I have said to you, nor would I if I could! What do you, what can you mean?"

He turned round so that the moon shone full upon her face, and, looking fixedly at her, he said, in a bewildered tone:

"I know not what to think. You are too true a woman to jest where so much is at stake. Were you anybody else, I should be tempted to think that you were trifling."

She drew her arm from his, and stood before him in the clear moonlight.

"Charles," she began, "Dr. Beaufort——"

"Away with formalities!" he said, impatiently. "Call me Charles, call me anything, if you will, but relieve this suspense."

She still trembled so much that he again tried to take her arm; but she resisted, and, leaning for support against a tree, said with effort, and with a quivering voice:

"Charles, it is now your turn to listen to me. I am still the honest, truthful woman that you have ever believed me—too honest to jest and trifle at such a time, and with too true a woman's heart not to feel deeply pained by the consciousness of the pain that I am obliged to inflict. Believe me, I would have spared you this if I could. If I could have prevented it, you never should have spoken these words to me; but, as it is, I can only regret it, and tell you that for what I now say I have a reason, which, if I could disclose it, your own judgment would approve. It is better, far better for both, that these feelings should be crushed in the bud; they can never bring either of us anything but sorrow and pain, for——" she hesitated, and even in the moonlight he could see the pallor which overspread her face,—“for between you and me there is an insurmountable barrier. I cannot remove it, nor can any other human being, nor can my lips reveal it. You must be content to know that it is insurmountable, and that you yourself would deem it so if you knew what it was."

"Strange! very strange!" he murmured. "Why this barrier now, Julia? It did not exist in our former intercourse, or if it

did, you ignored it then. Tell me, tell me," he entreated, "what do you, what can you mean?"

"Ask me no more, Charles, this is all that I can tell you;" she paused a moment, and then added, extending her hand, "will you believe that I am sincere when I tell you that from my inmost soul I am sorry for the pain that I inflict; will you believe that I could not help it; will you forgive me, and will you seal your forgiveness by granting me one favor, the last one that I will probably ever ask of you?"

"Name it. I can refuse you nothing."

"Will you promise me that no human being shall ever know what I have said to you to-night; neither Uncle John nor anybody else?"

"Nobody," he answered, "if you so decree it."

They walked along several minutes in silence, and then he said, earnestly and sadly:

"And have you nothing more to say, Julia? If I may not know why I am thus dismissed, may I not have the consolation of knowing that if you cannot accept the love that I have offered you, you at least do not spurn it? that if I cannot occupy the place in your heart that I desire, I may yet be remembered, if not with affection, at least with interest? Will not your thoughts sometimes follow me with sympathy into those scenes of blood, and carnage, and suffering, which will henceforth make up my life? Will you not sometimes pray for me? sometimes wonder if I am still spared to fulfill my country's mission, or if I sleep in a forgotten grave?"

"Oh, Charles, Charles," she entreated, "spare me! You little know how much I am——"

"Suffering," she was about to say, but she checked the unspoken word, although her face revealed it plainly enough.

She paused a moment, as if trying to collect her thoughts, and then said, in painful perplexity:

"If I only knew what it was right to say! Surely it cannot be wrong to tell you more; to tell you that if I cannot marry you, I at least can and will think of you, and pray for you every day of your soldier life!"

"Thank you for that promise, Julia! Thank you for that much of comfort! And now, will you not answer me one more question? will you not tell me if you refuse me because you love and are promised to another?"

She thought a moment, and then answered:

"It cannot be wrong to afford you this poor satisfaction! No, Charles, this is not the difficulty, and, what is more, I can safely promise that it never will be. I expect to live and die

Julia Cameron. This is all that I can tell you; for the rest, you will have to trust my judgment and truthfulness."

"In any other matter that were easy enough to do; but in something which so nearly concerns my own happiness, I would very much like to have the difficulties submitted to the decision of my own judgment. And now, Julia, one, only one more question. You have confessed that you do not love another; is it because you cannot love me that you now send me away? May I not ask this one question?"

Her heart throbbed violently, and the blood rushed to her temples, but with a strong effort she answered, quietly:

"No, Charles, you may not ask, neither may I answer, any more questions."

"You do not say no!" he exclaimed, gladly. "Julia, I must, I will hope! I shall live—and it may be, alas! die—in the hope that you will still be mine, that we may remove or perhaps out-live this obstacle, and our destiny may yet be the same!"

"Do not, Charles," she said, earnestly, "do not indulge any such hope, for, believe me when I tell you that it can only end in disappointment. I speak truthfully when I say that no human being can remove the obstacle that separates us, and that as long as it exists I cannot marry you. And now you must never renew this subject, never again allude to this night. Let us try, Charles, to be friends," she added, extending her hand, "kind friends, if we may not be anything more to each other!"

"This is not what I asked," he said, grasping the extended hand; "but if I may not have Julia Cameron for my wife, still I cannot but prize her as my friend. God bless you, Julia! God ever bless and keep you! I may not marry you, but I cannot help loving you. Julia," he added, earnestly and solemnly, "I love you now, and I will love you until I die."

Respectfully and tenderly he bent down and kissed the hand which he held in his own, and preventing her, as she tried to extricate it from his grasp, he still held it, and said:

"You have refused me one request to night, the one whose denial will darken my whole life; perhaps you cannot find it in your heart to deny me another. Will you give me the little prayer-book that I saw in your hand at church to-day?"

"Not that, but a better one; and I thank you for a request that it gives me so much pleasure to grant."

"I do not want a better one, Julia. I want that one particularly."

"Why, Charles?"

"Promise me, and I will tell you. Will you give it to me?"

"Yes."

"I want it because, the day after your arrival at the Springs, when we were strangers, we sat together at a Sunday morning service in the ball-room. I saw that book in your hand, a contrast, in its worn and well-used appearance, to the velvet and gilt, the embossed morocco, and clasped books, in the hands of others around, and as great a contrast too in the reverent way in which it was used, and in the earnestness and sincerity with which its words were uttered."

"Charles," she replied, "if I had known this, I would not have promised you that book. Your own sense of right must tell you how unwise it is, to say the least, to do anything to encourage and foster these feelings. If it were possible, it would be better for your happiness to forget everything that has occurred this night. Take my advice: let me give you another book."

"Positively, no. You have promised me that, and I will not consent to exchange it."

As they were returning to the house, he said:

"Will you write to me sometimes, Julia? I do not ask such a letter as I would like to have, but I would be thankful for as cold a one as you would deem it best to write. It would be something to look forward to."

"I cannot do it, Charles. It would not be right."

"May I, then, occasionally write to you? I will promise, upon the honor of a man, not to write one word which your brother might not."

How she longed to say with her lips the "yes," for which her heart pleaded; but she only replied, quietly:

"No, Charles, it is better not."

"Then may I not send you a message sometimes, in my letters to Uncle John, and receive now and then, through them, some word of friendly remembrance?"

But still the answer came, firm, but sad:

"No, it must not be."

Blessings and good wishes had been exchanged, and the last farewells had been spoken. Julia stood a little apart, holding in her hand the book that she had promised, and awaiting her turn to speak the painful word. She heartily wished it over, for she had already been taxed to the extent of her endurance, and she greatly feared lest at the last her self-control might fail her.

He took the book from her hand, and said, in a low tone:

"I must not write, I must not even send a message, but I will come. This you shall not, you cannot prevent. Some time, when I can be spared for a day or two, I will, I must see you. God bless you, Julia!"

He pressed her hand, and looked earnestly into her face, as she answered :

“God bless——”

Her firmness all gave way, and with a sob she turned away, rushed into the house, and locked herself in her own room.

Julia was not given to tears, but she had imposed upon her fortitude, during the last two days, a heavier burden than it could bear. She had struggled successfully until the time for struggling was over, but though a conqueror, she was still exhausted with the conflict. Worn out and helpless, she threw herself upon the bed, and sobbed and cried as if her heart would break. All her pent-up feelings now broke forth in a flood, which, in the solitude and unrestraint of her own chamber, she allowed to sweep unchecked over her soul.

“He loves me,” she thought, passionately, “and God only knows how with soul and strength I love him in return, and yet I have sent him away perhaps forever, without one loving word, without permission to write or send a message, without promise of a cheering letter, or a comforting word to refresh him when he is weary and heart-sick, in the midst of danger and suffering ! He is gone with the assurance that we must always be to each other just what we are now ; gone with nothing but the meager promise that I would sometimes remember, sometimes pray for him ! He is gone to risk and it may be to lose his life for his country, for his home, for me ; he asked and was refused a kindly message ! I have denied him what I would gladly give to the most degraded soldier in the Confederate army !”

In her excitement, she exclaimed aloud :

“Oh ! if I could only recall him, I would tell him all ; tell him that I love him better than my life, tell him that I bear a dishonored name, and love him far too well to wish to link it to his own ! Even to see him shrink from me as from a contaminated thing, would be less intolerable than this life of hypocrisy to which I have condemned myself ! How shall I, how can I hide from him, from the world, the love with which my heart is throbbing and bursting ? And is it right to assume an indifference which I do not feel, against which my whole soul rebels ? I did not deal truly with him ; I kept back from him what he had a right to know. Rather than tell him of my brother’s infamy, I have sent him away without explanation, I have refused him the poor consolation of knowing that if I could not marry him, at least I could and did love him with heart and soul ! Oh, George, George ! how has your treachery blighted, not only the name, but the hopes and the happiness of every Cameron !”

CHAPTER XVII.

It was the evening of the twenty-second of July. Along the electric wires had sped to the remotest corner of the Confederacy the result of the first great battle of the Southern revolution, and the heart of the nation throbbed high with hope and gratitude, as it drank in the tidings of the victory upon the plains of Manasses. The first impulse everywhere was that of thankfulness and exultation; the next, was the sickening fear of every heart lest the victory should have been purchased at the price of blood dearer than its own, at the sacrifice of a life which it would gladly have given its own to save.

The telegraph office at Hopedale had been crowded all day. Anxious faces were gathered there, traced with lines of dread and suspense, as one and another received the slip of paper, so small, and yet laden with relief or agony, as husband, son, brother was pronounced safe, wounded, or dead. Mr. Cameron and Uncle John had been there since early in the morning, but as yet there were no tidings either from Charles or Walter. As the day wore on, their anxiety increased, though neither acknowledged it to the other; but each thought that if both were safe, one or the other would have telegraphed. At dark, they left the office, and went to Uncle John's to tea, purposing to return immediately after and await the tidings. When they passed the cottage, Grace was leaning upon the gate, with Agnes at her side.

"I have waited so long and so anxiously for you," she said, "hoping that you would pass this way. Any news from Walter or Dr. Charles?"

Uncle John shook his head in silence, and Agnes said:

"Do tell us, Uncle John; we want to hear so much."

"No news yet, daughter." I am going again to the office, after tea, and if I hear anything I will call and tell you."

"Don't forget, Uncle John. Mother and I will be very lonely to-night, for I cannot even play the organ now. This has been the longest day that I ever spent. How much longer must we wait to hear?"

"I do not know, my daughter. We must try and be patient. The time seems long and weary to others as well as to you."

While Mr. Cameron and Uncle John were silently drinking their tea, they were startled by a violent ring at the hall bell.

Uncle John hastened to answer it himself, and as he recognized the well-known envelope, he felt for an instant as if he would fall. His hands trembled so that he could scarcely break the seal, and when he saw the words "Walter safe," and Charles Beaufort's signature, his eyes filled so that he could read no more. He hastened with it to Mr. Cameron, relieving his suspense at once by exclaiming, as he reached the door:

"Thank God! Thank God!"

Mr. Cameron read it over and over, as if almost afraid to believe the good tidings, and then sat for some minutes holding the slip of paper in his hand in silence. Then, suddenly recollecting himself, he arose hastily, saying:

"I must go at once. Poor girls! they have had a long, anxious day."

He laid the paper on the table, and Uncle John took it up and exclaimed, as he read it,— "Why, what is all this?"

"Have you not read it before, sir?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"No. My old heart and my old eyes filled up so when I saw that the boys were both safe, that I could not read any more just then; but indeed I must bestir myself now. It will be more than I can do in one day, I am afraid, to make preparations in this little village for the accommodation of so many wounded."

"You may send as many out to the Hall, sir, as you please, if the distance from town, and consequently from surgical attendance, will be no objection. The house is large, and the weather warm, so that they can be accommodated with cots."

They left the house together, and went on their separate errands,—Mr. Cameron, with a lightened heart, to bear the welcome tidings to his daughters; and Uncle John, first to relieve Grace and Agnes, as he had promised, and then to see what could be done to provide for the comfort of the expected sufferers.

Drearly and heavily the day had passed at the Hall. Eva, whose accustomed excitability and impulsiveness were now goaded on by suspense, had been almost frantic all day. She had had before but little foreboding or anxiety on her brother's account, for she was too unfamiliar with war to realize his danger; but now that the fierce battle which, prospectively, had seemed to her a dim and shadowy thing, was indeed a reality, an accomplished fact, her excited imagination conjured up a thousand horrors, with which she tortured herself until mind and body were alike exhausted. She had walked for hours up and down the parlor, up and down the hall, up and down the veranda, and at last, reckless of the blazing July sun, she rushed down to the lawn-

gate, and strained her eyes to see if in the distance she could not recognize her returning father. But nothing relieved the monotony of the red, dreary road, upon which the sun poured down, without tree or shrub to afford a shelter from its scorching rays. She waited, and looked, and hoped, and finally, regardless of everything except the relief of her torturing suspense, along that burning road she ran, conscious of nothing, thinking of nothing, except to hear from Walter. When she reached the middle of the lane, weak with excitement, and exhausted by the heat, she found it impossible to advance another step. She sat down upon the roadside, with no shade to screen her throbbing head, which ached intensely. Still she looked and watched for her father, but he did not come; then she looked all around for some human figure, some servant in the adjoining fields, to whom she might appeal for help, but nothing was to be seen. It seemed as if the sickening desolation of her own heart was reproduced upon the scene around her. She was, however, too restless to sit still long, and, growing sick and faint, she determined to try and get home. The way seemed interminable, and several times she was compelled to sit down and rest, but at last she reached the gate. The two enormous oaks, that stood like sentinels one on each side, threw their sheltering branches far and wide, and, lured by the refreshing shade, the tired child threw herself down upon the grass, and in a few moments found a temporary forgetfulness of her troubles and anxieties in a profound sleep.

Her quiet but not less anxious sister had suffered as severely as herself; but with Julia, there had been no tears, no restlessness, no outburst of grief. On the contrary, she was unnaturally calm, and there was no evidence of unwonted excitement, except in the lines of quiet determination around her mouth, and the almost stern resolution expressed in her eye, as if she were bracing herself to receive an impending blow. Unlike Eva, this had not come upon her with the suddenness and unexpectedness of the lightning stroke. She had accustomed herself to reflect upon the dangers to which her loved ones were exposed, and while she had prayed constantly and earnestly that they might be spared, yet she knew that the blow must fall somewhere, and realized that she had no more right than others to expect exemption from its crushing weight. She, too, had a heavier burden than her sister. The fate of two rested upon her heart, one of whom she loved with almost a mother's love, and the other with almost a wife's.

Julia felt that she had grown much older in the past few months, that she was beginning to experience the discipline of

life. She had always regarded herself as prematurely old, and thought that her position, as the elder sister of a motherless family, had made her so, and had familiarized her, even in childhood, with those cares and anxieties which are generally not laid upon us until we have reached maturity; but she now felt as if she had never before known the meaning of the words anxiety and care, as if she were just now beginning to learn what was really meant by the burden and responsibilities of life. The blight upon her name, the disappointment of her affections, the burden of feeling which she could not crush, and yet must forever conceal, not only from the world, but also from him who, she thought, had a right to know it; and now, superadded to all this, her suspense and anxiety about brother and lover formed, indeed, a burden which would have weighed down a heart more inured than hers to care and sorrow.

It seemed to her that a month had passed since the morning's dawn, and the only evidence of restlessness in her manner was the frequent glance at the clock, and the expression of disappointment when she saw that it was only a few minutes later than when she had looked last. The evening before, the telegraph wires had conveyed the tidings of the raging battle, and at sunrise this morning her father had gone to town, promising to return as soon as he heard from Walter. Hour after hour had passed, and still he did not come. She sat and thought, for she could not do anything else. Even her effort to read her Bible lessons had been fruitless, and the painful monotony of the weary time was only broken by the occasional appearance at the door of Mammy Nancy's anxious face, and the same question repeated every time:

"Miss Julia, you ain't heard nothin' from my boy, yet?"

"No, Mammy Nancy, not yet. Papa has not come."

At last three o'clock came, the usual dinner-hour. She went out on the veranda and looked down the lawn, but her father was not coming, and so she walked down to the gate that she might look up the road. As she approached the gate, she was greatly amazed to see a sleeping figure under the trees, and her surprise was turned to anxiety when she found that it was Eva. She went up to her, and was quite alarmed when she saw her crimson face, and felt her burning forehead, and the quick pulsation of her throbbing temples. She found some difficulty in awakening her, but at last succeeded, and assisted her to the house, where, with Mammy Nancy's help, she put her to bed. Julia could not find out where Eva had been, or how she came under the tree, for the moment that her head touched the pillow she was asleep again.

"Still another anxiety!" thought poor Julia, as she looked at her sleeping sister and longed for her father's return. She thought that the summer day would never end; but when at last it was sunset, then twilight, then quite dark, and still her father came not, her suspense became intolerable.

It was nine o'clock when her listening ear caught the sound of horse's hoofs. She rose quietly from Eva's bedside; but as soon as she was out of the room, her limbs kept pace with her anxiety, as she flew down stairs and reached the steps of the veranda just as her father was dismounting.

"Safe, my daughter!" were the only words that he uttered.

The sudden reaction was too great, and she sank upon the steps.

"What is the matter, my child?" inquired her father, anxiously, as he lifted her up.

"Nothing, papa, except that I have been so anxious all day that I could not bear any more. Did Walter telegraph?"

"No, Charles Beaufort."

Julia was thankful for the supporting arm that still upheld her, for without it she would have fallen again.

"Here is the telegram. It was sent to Uncle John, but he thought that you girls would like, with your own eyes, to read the good news."

In her inmost soul Julia blessed Uncle John's considerate kindness, as, standing under the hall lamp, she devoured the few words of the precious missive. Charles and Walter both safe! How, in comparison with this great deliverance, all the other mercies and blessings of her life dwindled into insignificance! She spoke not a word, but her full heart went out in fervent thanksgiving as the tears, which anxiety and sorrow had but frozen in her heart, now melted and overflowed in silent joy and gratitude.

"You have spent an anxious day, my poor child," said her father, kindly.

"Yes, sir; the most anxious, the most painful one of my whole life."

"Thank God, it is over now! But, Julia, indeed you must go to bed, my daughter, for you are so tired now that you can scarcely stand. You look really sick."

"I am not sick now, papa, though I have felt so all day. No cordial was ever so strengthening as was that blessed telegram. But Eva is sick, if I am not, and I have been anxious about her all day. Come up stairs and see her."

"What is the matter, Julia?"

She told him where she had found her, and how profoundly

she had slept all the afternoon, and Mr. Cameron hastened up to see her. She still had a high fever, and her father stood looking anxiously at her.

"Poor child!" he said, compassionately. "Her light heart does not bear trouble like yours, my daughter."

He laid his hand upon Julia's head, and stood and looked, first at one and then at the other, and the father's heart was full, as he read in both the effect of this, their first acquaintance with the sorrows of war, and thought how light it might be in comparison with the experience yet in store for them. He heaved a sigh, and turned and went away.

The next morning, when Eva awoke, she was confused and bewildered. Her sister was moving quietly about the room, and Eva watched her with a dull, listless gaze, until recollection began gradually to return, and she was finally aroused to a full and perfect consciousness of where she was, and of the events of yesterday. Julia did not know that she was awake, until she was startled by a quick, decided question.

"Sister, has papa come?"

"Yes, he came last night."

"And Walter?"

"Is safe, Eva."

With a single bound, and a cry of joy, the impulsive child sprang from the bed, and before Julia knew what she was going to do, or had time to expostulate, she had thrown on her dress and rushed down stairs. She met Carlo on the way, stopped to give him a hearty squeeze and tell him that his master was safe, and then burst into her father's room to hear the particulars. Mr. Cameron was so startled by her excited appearance, and the unexpectedness of her coming, that for an instant he could not answer the questions that she began rapidly to pour out. At last, however, she was fully satisfied, and then her father tried to convince her of her imprudence, in thus leaving her bed and giving way to such excitement, and told her that she would surely induce a return of fever.

"Oh, no, papa!" she answered. "I never was better in my life than I am this morning. Trouble and anxiety can make me sick, but joy never! I thought yesterday that I would certainly die, and I really do believe that two or three days of suspense like that would kill anybody in the world."

"And yet, my daughter, there are many hundreds, nay, even thousands, in this land to-day, who are suffering, and will continue to suffer, for days, and it may be weeks, or even months, the same torturing suspense that you found it so hard to bear for a single day. Some poor fellows, perhaps, fell unnoticed upon the battle-

field; some are lying wounded, suffering too much to think of anything except their own agony, and with no friends thoughtful enough to telegraph their condition to the anxious hearts at home; some are prisoners, and their fate unknown; and even among those who escaped unhurt there are a thousand things, in the confusion and bustle after a battle, to make men forget or slow to perform so important a duty. This, my child," said Mr. Cameron, sadly, "this is *war*."

"Oh, papa! when will it be over? Will not this one battle be enough?"

"Ah, my child, no human foresight can see the end; this is only the beginning! It may be that before it is over we may have many experiences, compared with which the suffering of yesterday may be but the dust of the balance. God alone knows, Eva, what is still before us."

The light-hearted child heeded not her father's sad words and sadder tone. All future trouble and anxiety were merged in her present happiness. Walter was safe, and she was happy, and she answered gaily:

"Well, it will at least be some time, I hope, before we fight another battle. I do trust that we have whipped the Yankees so badly that they will never stop running until they land in the Gulf of St. Lawrence."

"To *land* in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Eva," replied her father, smiling, "would be as difficult an achievement for Yankee ingenuity, as to give a ball this week in Richmond *via* Bull-Run and Manassas has proved to be for Yankee valor."

"Bull-Run!" she repeated, laughing, "I like that name; it tells the result in itself. May they run until they are thoroughly tired! Tell me something about the battle, papa."

"I cannot, Eva. I only know the result, that it was a decided victory for the Confederate arms. We will have to wait some days before we get the full particulars in the newspapers."

"Won't you be anxious to read all about it, papa?"

"Yes, my daughter, very. I am truly thankful for the result of this, our first great battle. But, Eva, where is your sister? If she is ready for breakfast, order it at once, for I want to go to town immediately. I must help Uncle John to-day."

"I am sure, papa," she answered, laughing, "I have no idea where sister is. The last time that I saw her, she was standing in blank amazement and with uplifted hands in the middle of the floor, at the idea of my getting up and running down stairs. I would not be surprised if she were standing there yet."

At the breakfast-table, Julia said:

"What is the matter, Eva? Doesn't your coffee suit you?"

"It is as good as usual, I suppose, sister, but I believe that I would rather have a cup of tea."

The tea was tried, but with no better success. She was balancing her spoon listlessly upon her cup, as she said:

"Papa, please order the buggy instead of the horse, and take me to town with you. I do want so much to see somebody and to hear something."

"You seem to be quite able, Eva, to go to town," he replied, looking at her untasted breakfast. "I rather think that the bed is the proper place for you, for judging from your cheeks the fever is not quite gone yet."

"I wish, papa," said Julia, "that you would order Eva positively to bed. You don't know how sick she was yesterday."

"That was only because I was distressed and anxious, sister."

"Whatever might have been the cause, Eva, the result was that you were very sick, and that I was very uneasy."

"Oh! you were nervous and excited yesterday, and exaggerated my case. Papa certainly will not condemn me to bed this hot day, when I am perfectly well, because he thinks that I ought to be sick after yesterday's achievement!"

"I will not condemn you to bed, Eva, unless you are inclined to go; but I certainly must insist upon your staying in the house all day. Remember," he added, smiling, "no more pleasant walks up the lane under a mid-day sun."

"You might spare yourself the trouble of that command, papa, since yesterday's experience of a noon-day promenade in a treeless lane, in July, will probably suffice me for some time. Next time I will be more patient, since I find that so far from hearing the news first by going to meet you, sister, who sat quietly in the house, heard it all ten or twelve hours before I did."

"Yes, Eva, sometimes your haste and impetuosity overleap themselves. You would have saved yourself some suffering, and your sister much anxiety, if you had stayed at home as she did."

"Oh, papa, that would have been impossible! If I had been pent up in the house all day yesterday, I should have died. I needed the fresh air."

"And the hot sun, too, I suppose, Eva."

"Yes, papa, even that—anything was better than sitting still and waiting. You do not know how long and weary the hours are when you are waiting."

"Yes I do, daughter, for I too was waiting yesterday; waiting all day at the office, just as anxious, and just as weary, as you were at home. You are right, Eva. To sit with folded hands and to wait is sometimes the hardest thing that we can

be called upon to do ; and yet, my daughter, it is what, at some period or other of life, we all have to learn to do."

When Mr. Cameron went to town, he found Uncle John extremely busy. Mind and body were alike engaged and interested ; and regardless of the intense heat he worked hard all day. In the evening, on his way to the depot, he stopped at the cottage.

"I have not seen you all day, Uncle John," Agnes said. "You have been so busy about the soldiers that you have forgotten me."

"Not forgotten you, my daughter, that I never do ; but very busy, Agnes, too busy to come as usual to see you, and I thought that you would be the last child in the Confederacy to complain of having to sacrifice some of your pleasure for the sake of the soldiers. I have been trying all day to do something to make the poor fellows comfortable when they come. It is little enough at best that we can do for those who have done so much for us !"

"I am glad that you made the arrangements, Uncle John, for I know that you can do such things better than anybody else. I did not mean to complain, just now, because you had not been here to-day ; I only meant to say that I had missed you."

"And I have missed my visit as well, Agnes ; for you may believe me, when I tell you that as far as mere comfort and pleasure were concerned, I would much rather have been sitting in your cool parlor, listening to the organ, than to have been working as hard as I have been all day."

"You look tired, Uncle John," said Grace.

"And so I am, Grace. Whenever I do any hard work or take any unusual exercise, I am quickly reminded that I am not so young as I was thirty years ago. But I have stayed longer than I ought," he said, looking at his watch. "The train is due at seven, and I will scarcely have time to get to the depot."

He hurried away, and when he arrived at the place he found, as usual on such occasions, a great crowd gathered there. Vehicles of every description had been pressed into service for the transportation of the wounded, and were crowded together on each side of the track. When the train arrived, the sight of mangled and suffering humanity was enough to move the most unfeeling heart. It was soon found that only a few could be removed in carriages. The rest had all to be laid upon mattresses in spring wagons, or carried on litters to the hospital. This retarded the work very much, and it was ten o'clock before they had all been removed. Among the rest Uncle John noticed, in one of the cars, a gray-headed man, apparently about his own age, who was not wounded, but seemed to be very sick. He aroused him when his turn came, and asked him if he was able to

ride in a carriage. The sick man opened his eyes languidly, and said, in a feeble voice.

"Yes. I am not wounded, I am only sick. Are all the poor fellows gone?"

"Not yet, sir. There are a good many yet to be removed. They have to be handled so gently, that it is slow work."

"Never mind me, sir," said the sick man. "Attend to the others first; they are in great agony, but I am not in any pain. I can wait very well."

He closed his eyes, and seemed to fall asleep as soon as he stopped speaking, and Uncle John left him and continued his work. At last he was done. All the worst cases had been concentrated at the hospital for the convenience of the surgeons, and the remainder had been distributed among the private families of the town. None had been found able to bear a ride of three miles, so that none had been sent to the Hall. Uncle John had sent two of the wounded men to his own house, and the sick man was now the last one to be disposed of. With difficulty they half supported and half carried him to the carriage, where he sank back exhausted upon the cushions. Uncle John jumped in after him, and bade the driver take them home as rapidly as possible.

The next morning, when the physician was leaving the house after his visit, Uncle John followed him to the door, and said:

"What do you think of my patients, doctor?"

"The wounded men, sir, I think, will both get well without any difficulty—their wounds are painful, but not dangerous; but the sick man will die. It is a low form of typhoid fever, and he is too old to stand it. He is almost worn out now. I wonder how he came here? He could not possibly have done anything worse, than with this disease to have traveled, at this season, in a car crowded with wounded men."

"I do not know," replied Uncle John, "how he came here, or anything about him. He was apparently more dead than alive when I found him last night in one of the cars; and he is so weak and exhausted this morning, that I have not troubled him with any questions."

"Yesterday's journey was enough to have killed him outright. His friends, if he had any, had very little judgment even to have permitted it."

Uncle John's hands were now indeed full, and so occupied and interested was he in his work, that the days were quite too short for the duties that he imposed upon himself. Every day he went to the hospital to learn what was needed, and to see that it was supplied, and to speak those few words of kindly sympathy which cost the speaker so little, and are so refreshing to the homeless,

friendless sufferer. He never came empty-handed, but always brought either some little delicacy, prepared at his request by some lady friend, or a book or newspaper with which to beguile the tedious hours, or a bouquet of bright flowers, which spoke sweetly of home to hearts longing for its loving faces, its soothing comforts, and its nursing care.

He came in one day, and going up to a cot whereon lay a robust, stalwart man, perhaps a little past the meridian of life, whose leg had been amputated two days before, he said :

"How are you this morning, my friend? Are you able to read a paper to-day? I see here a long account of the battle in which you participated; perhaps, if you are not in too much pain, you would like to read it."

"I can read at least a little, sir, and would like very much to do so. I am not in so much pain this morning as I was yesterday."

Uncle John left the newspaper with him, and went on his usual round through the hospital. As he passed the cot again, on his way out, he saw the paper lying beside the man, and on his face there was an expression of deep gloom. He went up to him, and, taking his hand, said kindly :

"What is the matter? Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing, sir," he answered, as with his large rough hand he dashed the moisture hastily from his eyes.

"Look here," he said, pointing to the opening paragraph of the account of the battle of Manassas, "and then look there!" pointing to the sufferers all around the room. "And this suffering," he added, "is but a small item of the whole! I was on the battle-field; I know something of what that victory cost!"

The paragraph to which he pointed heralded the victory, and bade the people rejoice that so signal a triumph was won at so trifling a cost—only a few thousand men! "*Only a few thousand!*" A few thousand souls hurried into eternity! A few thousand lives cut off in the prime and vigor of manhood! A few thousand desolate homes! A few thousand widows! A few thousand helpless orphans! A few thousand bleeding hearts! "*Only a few thousand!*" Great God! the fearful price of a single victory! The thoughtless world hears only its loud shout of exultation, but Thine ears and Thy compassionate heart listen to its wail of anguish!

Uncle John read in silence, and then looked mournfully at the mangled limbs and suffering faces around him. There was, indeed, even in that single village hospital, a painful discord in the glad song of victory, and Uncle John felt it not less than the sufferer before him. After a moment's silence, he pointed sadly to his useless stump, and his voice quivered as he said :

"I could have borne it myself, sir; but the wife, the children at home, are dependent upon my arm and my limbs for their daily bread!"

For this, Uncle John had no reply; but the wounded man blessed him in his heart, for the moistened eye which met his own in speechless sympathy, and for the kind pressure of the hand, with which he silently turned and went away.

The next morning, on his way to the hospital, he met Julia and Eva just going in the gate at the cottage. Eva had brought a magnificent bouquet for Agnes, who dearly loved fragrant flowers. Oleanders, heliotrope, geraniums, and mignonette blended their delicate perfume and their exquisite beauty, and Uncle John looked admiringly and longingly at them.

"Give me that bunch of flowers, daughter," he said, eagerly. "I want it particularly."

"I have promised it to Agnes, Uncle John; but I will come to town again this evening, and bring you a larger, handsomer one than this."

"But I want that, and I want it now. Tell Agnes that I knew it was designed for her, and that I took it away from you. I know that she will not object."

"You are welcome to it, Uncle John, if you will take the responsibility of her disappointment. What do you want with it?"

"I want it for a poor young fellow in the hospital; a gentle, patient youth, who has enlisted my sympathies greatly."

He took the flowers, and as he approached the bed where the youth was lying, the expression of suffering relaxed into a smile, and the languid eye brightened as he saw the flowers.

"Are you better this morning, my son?" inquired Uncle John, cheerfully, as with a touch, gentle as that of woman, he smoothed the dark hair back from his forehead.

"Yes, Uncle John, better than I was yesterday, though I suffered greatly all night. May I smell those flowers one minute, sir, if you please?" and he stretched out his hand to take them.

"Not one minute only, Willie, but until they are faded and dead, and then I will bring you some more. I brought them specially for you. They look like home, don't they, my son?"

He eagerly grasped the bouquet, and carried it to his face, more to hide his tears than to smell the flowers. All through the weary night, when he was quivering with pain and parched with fever, he had bitten his lips to keep back the groans which he thought it unmanly to utter; and his thoughts had rushed back to his home in the sunny South, and he had longed for his mother's hand upon his forehead, for his father's look and voice of sym-

pathy, for his sister's gentle offices of love. And under cover of the darkness, he had, quietly and unobserved, shed those tears which he would not have his comrades see, and his heart had relieved itself of its burden, and this morning he had felt himself a man again. But a single word had, like a rushing flood, swept away all his supposed manliness. The word *home* had made him a child again, and choking down a sob, he turned his face away and buried it in the pillow.

Uncle John stood and looked at him a moment in profound compassion, and then passed on with a sigh. He could not go away without another glance at Willie, and so, after he had seen all the others, he passed again by his bed. Willie motioned him to come to him, and taking his hand, he pressed it warmly, and said, glancing at the bouquet:

"Thank you for this! it does indeed look like——"

The word would not come; but Uncle John, seeming not to notice it, said, cheerfully:

"You must make haste and get better, my son. Just as soon as you are able to bear a ride of three miles, you shall exchange your present discomfort for pleasanter lodgings; you shall go to the place where these beautiful flowers grew, where you shall have a fresh bouquet every morning, and, what is better still, two sweet human flowers to keep you company; one as bright as that oleander, and the other as sweet as that heliotrope. How will you like that, Willie?"

"More than I can tell you, sir," he answered, his face brightening. Indeed, Uncle John, I do not feel as if I could ever get well here. There is so much noise and confusion, and it excites me so to see the sufferings, and hear the groans of the poor fellows, that sometimes I feel as if I should lose my senses. I would give the whole world, if I had it, for one day's quiet."

"And you shall have it, my poor boy," said Uncle John, kindly, "just as soon as the surgeon says that you may be removed. Try and be patient a little longer; try and be a soldier, Willie, in the hospital, as you were on the field of Manassas; bear up bravely a little while, and take care of yourself, and I promise to take you to a place where I warrant that you shall find some compensation at least for your present discomfort and suffering."

"You will not forget it, Uncle John!" he said, with almost childlike simplicity.

"Not I, Willie! Some day soon, before you dream that you are well enough to go, I will have a comfortable spring-wagon at the door, and your mattress shall be lifted into it, with you lying upon it just as you are now, and I myself will drive you out to

Cameron Hall, and you shall be compelled to admit that Uncle John is the gentlest driver that ever took the reins."

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times thank you!"

He looked at the bouquet, and asked:

"Did you arrange it, sir?"

"Never did such a thing in my life," he replied, laughing. "I can challenge the skill of any gardener in the world in trimming a hedge or cutting pea-sticks, but as for making a bouquet, my fingers are too awkward, and my taste not delicate enough, for such work as that. No, I leave all my bouquets to be arranged by those two human flowers that I was telling you about just now, Julia and Eva Cameron."

"Who made this?" he inquired.

"Eva, I suppose; at least I took it away from her this morning to bring to you."

"Would she think it presumptuous if I were to ask her to send me one occasionally, while I stay here?"

"No, indeed. I will engage that she will do it with pleasure. You wear the Confederate gray, Willie, and thus far you have worn it honorably, as your wound testifies, and that is passport enough to the kind offices of Cameron Hall. I will tell Eva, moreover, that you are just about the age of Walter, her young soldier-brother, and you will see what a magnificent bunch of flowers you will have to-morrow."

"Will you please do one thing for me before you go?"

"Certainly."

"Just bring a tumbler of water and put it on a chair by my bed. I want to keep my flowers fresh."

Uncle John did as he was requested, and as he left the suffering youth, so cheered and comforted by a little kindness and a few flowers, he thought:

"How little it sometimes takes in this world to give pleasure! How many opportunities of conferring happiness pass unimproved, because to our blindness they seem too insignificant!"

After leaving the hospital he called at the cottage, hoping to find the girls still there. He was not disappointed; and after relating the incident of the morning, he told Eva Willie's request. She assented gladly, as he had expected, and promised not an occasional, but a daily bouquet, so long as he should be in the hospital.

"He will probably be there a long time, Eva; at least it will be many months before he will be fit for service again, if he ever is. His wound was an exceedingly dangerous one, and for several days it was thought impossible for him to recover, and even now it will require great skill and care to bring him safely through.

Poor boy! he has evidently been delicately reared; and often, when I have stood by and seen him shrink involuntarily from the rough touch of his kind-hearted but unskillful nurses, I knew that he was contrasting it in his own mind with the gentle care which he had left behind. I promised him this morning, Julia, to remove him to the Hall just as soon as he could bear the ride, and I bespeak for him now the very best care and attention that you girls can give him."

"Which he shall certainly have, Uncle John," she replied. "We will do the very best for him that we can."

"I knew it, daughter, when I told him that he should go there. He is so uncomfortable at the hospital, and so worn out with its noise and its scenes of suffering, that, if it were possible, I would remove him at once. I have been not only interested in the youth, but amused as well. He evidently thinks it unsoldierly to admit that he is uncomfortable, or that he could be better off anywhere else. I have never been able to make him say even that he wanted anything that he did not have; but this morning, when I told him that I intended to remove him, in the fullness of his gratitude he admitted, without thinking, how glad he would be to get away, and how much suffering he might have been spared if he had been in a more quiet place. You would have been touched to see the eagerness with which he seized upon the promise, and begged me not to forget it. I have drawn a pleasant picture, girls, of the home to which I am going to take him, and of the family to whose keeping I am going to intrust him. You must see to it that all his anticipations are realized."

"We will do our best, Uncle John," said Eva; "but I am sorry that you promised so much. What made you do it?"

"One reason was, because I did not think that I had exaggerated the picture; for you ought to know, Eva, that I think the Hall a very pleasant home, and the Camerons very pleasant people; and the other reason was, because I felt so sorry for him, and so anxious at the moment to do something to divert his thoughts from his loneliness and suffering, that it would have been a strong temptation to draw a fancy sketch if it had been necessary. Fortunately, however, for my veracity, the simple truth was sufficiently attractive."

"Uncle John," said Eva, abruptly, "you have never had a letter from Dr. Charles since the battle. We have had two from Walter, and I certainly thought that Dr. Beaufort would have written to you. I was afraid that something had happened to him; but in his last letter Walter mentioned that he was well, but very busy."

"So I suppose, Eva, and I account for his silence in that way.

He must have his hands full now, and not very pleasant work either. Poor Charles !”

Julia glanced up quickly at Uncle John, but his face betrayed no knowledge of what she feared ; and Eva asked :

“ What makes you say so, Uncle John ?”

“ Because, Eva, he went away sad ; and I saw it and let him go without asking what was the matter. I thought that if he wished me to know he would have told me ; but I wish now that I had asked him. Perhaps I could have done something to cheer and comfort him.”

“ That might have been impossible, Uncle John.”

“ I think not, Eva. I have never known any trouble, either my own or that of others, for which a gentle word, or a look of sympathy, or an act of kindness had no soothing power. Something at least of these I might have done for Charles if he needed it.”

Julia had listened with seeming indifference until she could do so no longer. She saw that Charles had been faithful to his promise ; and that, however much relief he might have experienced from opening his heart to Uncle John, he had still sacredly regarded a request whose reasonableness he might well have doubted. In her first agony, she had reproached herself that she had not told him all ; but when the excitement was over, she could not regret that her own lips had refused to confess the blot upon her name. Now, however, she was afraid that she had thought only of herself in this matter ; that she had selfishly exacted of him a promise which denied him the comfort of a word of explanation not only from herself, but also from any other human being, and condemned him to bear his burden silently, unrelieved by that sympathy and kindness which Uncle John had just said were so soothing, and whose power she had herself felt and acknowledged.

“ I cannot bear this any longer,” she thought ; and at the first pause in the conversation, and at the risk of appearing abrupt, she asked :

“ Uncle John, how are your patients at home getting along ?”

“ The wounded, very well ; but the old man is slowly but surely wasting away. I feel an unaccountable interest in him, Julia.”

“ Not unaccountable, Uncle John ; for you never yet felt anything but interest and sympathy for the sick and suffering.”

“ But I feel for this old man a peculiar compassion. It may be because he is an old and gray-headed soldier ; and I admire in him the unselfish devotion to his country that I have not myself acted out, and which made him willing to do what he could, even with the probability before him that, as the event has proved, his life would be the forfeit.”

“ Uncle John,” she answered, “ you do not do yourself justice.

It is not your patriotism that is at fault, it is his judgment. He has not done his country any good by going into the ranks, because he was physically incapable of service; so are you, so is almost any old man. Perhaps, if he had stayed quietly at home, he would have found many ways of being as useful as you are now; but as it is, he has needlessly thrown away his life."

"You may be right, my daughter; but, after all, I cannot but admire the old man."

"Where is his home, Uncle John?" asked Eva.

"I do not know. I talk very little to him beyond asking how he feels and what he wants. I have stayed with him too a great deal, because I am afraid that he will die without anybody knowing it; but he sleeps almost constantly, and even when he is awake he is so exhausted that I cannot consent to torture him with questions. But I really must ask him about his home and friends, for when he dies I shall not even know where or to whom to write."

"It is a pity, Uncle John," said Julia, "that you did not do so at first, for by this time his wife or daughter, if he has any, might have reached here from almost any part of the Confederacy, and it would have been such a comfort to him."

"I wish now that I had, Julia; but when he reached here the physician thought him almost in a dying condition; and I have expected from day to day since that he would die. It is truly wonderful that he has lingered so long."

"Perhaps it is not too late even now; especially if his home could be reached by telegraph. It may be, that his family are near enough to get here in two or three days, if they could be telegraphed."

"He will not live that long, Julia."

"So you have thought, Uncle John, for two weeks. I would certainly make the attempt; it is worth the trial."

"Very well, I will ask him to-day. I hope that I have not been remiss about this thing; and I can scarcely blame myself, since if he had desired it I think that he would have requested it, for his mind is perfectly clear, and he has no hesitation in making known his wants. However, if it is to be done at all, it must be at once, for there is no time to lose, and so I will go this very minute and talk to him upon the subject."

He found the sick man with his eyes closed as usual; his wan features wearing that unmistakable impress with which Death marks his victims even before his fatal grasp has closed upon them. The slow, quiet heaving of the bosom alone betrayed that the feeble spark yet lingered. Uncle John entered quietly and took his seat, fearing to speak, lest he might be asleep; but his

step was heard and recognized, and, with the eyes still closed, a feeble voice said :

"I am not asleep, sir."

"Are you any better to-day?" asked Uncle John.

"No, sir, neither better nor worse. I suffer no pain ; it is only weakness."

"I have thought, my friend," said Uncle John, taking his wasted hand, "from the first moment that I saw you, that you were a very sick man, but have hoped from day to day that you would get better ; but as you do not think yourself that you are improving, would it not be better to telegraph for some of your family—wife or daughter?"

He shook his head languidly, and replied :

"I have neither."

"Then have you no friend whom you would like to see, and for whom I could send?"

"No, none sufficiently interested to come to see me, or to do as much for me, my kind sir, as you have done."

He rested a moment, and then added :

"I have neither brother nor sister ; and I laid my wife in a foreign grave, when I was scarcely more than a youth."

"And you have no children?"

The features worked convulsively, and Uncle John regretted the question when he saw the pain that it caused. Presently the answer came, almost with a gasp :

"One, somewhere in the world, but I know not where."

Uncle John's face expressed interest and sympathy ; but he greatly feared the effects of excitement upon so wearied a frame, and, wishing to put a stop to the conversation, he made no reply.

Presently the sick man said, languidly :

"That is the reason that I came to Hopedale. I hoped to hear something of my only daughter before I died ; but now it is too late. I have been too sick to talk upon so exciting a subject, and have been waiting to get better ; but the opportunity is gone. A few more hours are all that are left me now, and I must die as I have lived, not knowing even whether she is alive or dead."

The last word was inaudible, and in its place there came a weary sigh, and then he was very still. Uncle John thought for a moment that he was gone ; but he found that there was still a feeble pulse, and he hastily administered brandy. It was several minutes before he opened his eyes again ; and when he did, and was about to speak, Uncle John said :

"Not now, my friend. Don't talk any more now. Wait until to-morrow."

"To-morrow will never come to me. I must say what I have to say now. Tell me, do you know the Cameron family?"

"They are my best friends."

"Do you know the eldest son, George?"

"I never saw him. My acquaintance with the family began after he left home."

"He married my daughter."

"What!" exclaimed Uncle John, jumping up from his chair, and forgetting in his excitement the weakness and exhaustion of the sick man.

"Yes, sir," he answered; "and it was from them that I hoped to hear something of my child."

"You are doomed to disappointment, my poor friend," said Uncle John, kindly. "They have heard nothing from George for years; and if they ever heard that he was married, they have never mentioned it to me."

"Then my last hope is gone," he said wearily, and closed his eyes in disappointment and weakness. But he could not be silent. The thought of his child had given him unnatural strength, and it seemed that to be quiet now would be as great an effort as it had heretofore been to talk.

"Does his father, sir," he said, "know that his son is a captain in the Federal army?"

"Yes, sir," answered Uncle John.

"It is just what I should expect from him, sir. The man who will desert his family will desert his country, too."

Uncle John saw that he was determined to talk, and he could not refuse him the poor comfort of seeming interested in what was, to the dying man, the sole object of thought and desire, and he replied:

"Poor, miserable boy! From his childhood he has marred the happiness of every human being with whom he has been associated; it was not enough to have rendered father, mother, home unhappy, it seems that he must needs wreck the peace of his wife, too!"

"Yes, sir, my daughter was deserted, doubly deserted; first by her father, and then by her husband."

Uncle John was greatly surprised, and looked earnestly at the sick man, whose wasted cheeks now burned and his eyes sparkled with the fever's fire. His words of self-reproach were utterly inconsistent with his evident parental anxiety, and Uncle John began to fear lest the brain might at last have yielded to the effect of disease. He did not have to wait long, however, for an explanation, for the words came hurriedly:

"You are a stranger, sir; but you have been kind to me, and

I thank you for it. Do for me one more kindness, and the last: listen to the story of my life, and let me relieve my heart, even in dying, of some of that burden which I have borne in life alone, and without sympathy."

"My friend," he answered, "I will gladly do what I can to comfort and relieve you; but indeed you little know the injury that you are now doing yourself. This excitement has already greatly increased your fever. Wait until another time, and you shall tell me all."

"It must be now or never. Will you listen?"

"Yes, if it will comfort you."

"I told you, just now, that I buried my young wife in a foreign land, when I was scarcely more than a youth. She left me an infant daughter a few months old. I was by nature a domestic man. I loved my wife passionately, and felt her death most keenly, and until my child was three years old, I tried to find in her a solace and comfort for my loss. I was, however, in government service, and business called me a great deal from home and necessitated long absences. I had no one except a servant to take care of my child when I was away, and although she was faithful and kind, still I did not like her influence, and thought that justice to the child required that I should place her where she would be properly trained, and so I sent her back to the United States, to my mother, in South Carolina."

He stopped to rest, and Uncle John thought that it was something more than exhaustion which made his breath struggle so laboriously from his panting breast. In a few minutes he resumed his story. "But the change, however beneficial it might have been for her, proved a disastrous one to me. She was the last link that bound me to my home; child though she was, she had proved not only a companion, but guardian as well, for only those who have been intimately associated with little children can know the softening the almost holy influence that can be exerted upon the heart even of a man by a little child."

"I know it well, for I have felt it," interposed Uncle John, earnestly.

The sick man went on.

"When she was gone, I felt ashamed of the weakness that made me so dependent for happiness upon an infant, and I sought forgetfulness in the so-called manly pleasures and amusements of a gay foreign capital. I was never what the world calls a dissipated man, thank God for that! but the indurating effect of such a life gradually went on, until, in the course of years, if I did not exactly forget that I was a father, I at least lived and acted as if I had no child who had a right to expect and demand

of me a father's protection and love, and for whose happiness and well-being I was responsible. I heard from her through my letters from home, and they told me that she was fulfilling the promise of her infancy, in her beauty both of person and character; and when at last she was able to write herself, I felt proud of my daughter, and used to dream idly of an old age when I should be infirm and helpless, and should find in her all that a father's heart could ask, without my ever having done anything toward effecting so desirable a result. But such are not the ways of Providence. Parental duties are just as binding as are the obligations of children 'to honor father and mother;' and woe to that parent who voluntarily severs the sacred tie, and delegates to others those duties and responsibilities which God has expressly laid upon himself!

"Years passed on, and I grew tired, and longed for some variety in my life, for a man will grow restless and roving unless his heart is safely moored by domestic ties. Though in the strength and vigor of manhood, I was nevertheless too old to enter the navy; but in the ever-changing scenes of such a life I knew that I could alone find the adventure and variety which I craved, and therefore, in obedience to my desires, I soon found myself upon the broad ocean, with no home but my ship. I was now not only contented, but fascinated, and never thought of becoming a landsman again. Less and less frequently came the letters from home; but I learned to do without them, for I found enough of interest and pleasure in the society of my jovial companions, and in those foreign countries where everything was strange and new. One day, after a very long cruise, we sailed into the Gulf of Genoa. I had not received a line from mother or daughter for four long years, and there, at the consul's, I found an old letter, yellow and dusty, and dated three years back. It was from my daughter, telling me of her grandmother's death, and her consequent desolation, without parent or relative. It was a piteous letter, and there was still enough of the father left in me to be stirred up by it. To come home as fast as steam could bring me, to throw up my commission, and to spend the rest of my life in trying to repair the errors of its earlier years, and to be a true father to the child to whom I had been such only in name, was the resolve of an instant, and was executed as speedily as possible. I came back to my old home and found the house, indeed, but nothing else. The mother whom I had left there had been long dead, the young daughter whom I hoped to find there was gone. I learned how she had longed and waited for a reply to the several letters that she had written, imploring me to come to her, and finally how she had mourned for me as

dead. Beautiful and engaging, she had been sought and won by a young stranger, George Cameron, whose birth and name were his principal recommendations. His fascinating manners and handsome appearance had attracted her, and, lonely and desolate, with none to guide her in her choice, she had accepted, with all her trusting heart, the promise of that love and protection which she felt that she so much needed. As had been foreseen, he had not heart enough to appreciate the treasure that he had won, and before a year had elapsed he began to weary of the love that he had sought, and his desire for the roving adventurous life that he had led from his youth began to return. The coming of a little daughter did not satisfy him as she had hoped, and before it was six months old, lured by the golden dreams of California and the excitement of pioneer life, he had left wife and child, promising to make for them a comfortable home, and then return and take them to it. For a little while he wrote regularly; but by degrees he grew tired of this, as he did of everything else; and after awhile his letters ceased altogether. His wife made no complaint. She bore her trouble in silence and patience; but the grief which asked no sympathy in words, pleaded powerfully for it in the sad young face, which no smile ever lightened. One morning the town was startled by the fact that Mrs. Cameron and her child had disappeared. She was gone, none knew whither, for neither to friend nor servant had she by word or act betrayed her purpose, nor since that time had she ever been heard from.

“You may imagine, sir, the surprise, sorrow, and self-reproach, with which I heard this story, and remembered that this deserted young wife, wandering, with her infant, helplessly through the world, was my daughter, to whom I owed love and protection! I determined to find her, and to repay her with interest for the love that I had so long withheld. I would not, under any circumstances, have admitted the existence of difficulties which my strong determination of purpose could not overcome; but I believed, in these days of telegraphic and railway communication, that to find her and go to her would be the work of a very few weeks. But I have not found it so. I have sought her for years, and have used all the means in my power to find her. I have written more than once to Mr. Cameron, without success. I have written repeatedly to George, in California, but only received a reply to the first of my letters, in which he disclaimed all knowledge of his wife. Why I wanted to come here to die; why I should have expected that the Cameron family now could know anything of her; and why I should have felt disappointed when you told me that they did not, I cannot tell, unless it is the

tenacity of that hope which repeated disappointment cannot entirely crush. I have believed for years that she was dead, and have pursued my inquiries, not so much with the hope of seeing her, as of hearing how she lived, and where she died, and of getting some clew to her child.

"And now, sir, you see in the helpless old man, dependent upon a stranger for the kindness which is to soothe his dying bed, the wreck of manhood. Ah, sir! it is indeed a mournful thing, to stand at the close of life, and, looking back, to see nothing that you can remember with pleasure! It was this anxiety to repair, if possible, a wasted life; this longing to do something worth doing, before I died, that impelled me to join the army. I was afraid that I was too old to do my country any good, for sometimes, when the opportunities of a whole life are allowed to slip away unimproved, and at the last we want to do something, the privilege is denied us. So it is now with me. I have not been allowed even to serve my country! It took but a few weeks of camp life to prostrate the old man's strength; and when the thunders of artillery and the shouts of battle rent the air on the plains of Manassas, they fell upon an ear too heavy to be disturbed by the tumult, upon a mind and body too feeble to feel a quickening pulse, or a glad exultation when the cries of victory were heard.

"Some of the wounded men were brought into the tent where I was lying, and I heard a voice say: 'Some must be sent to Hopedale.' Hopedale! that single word roused the senses that could not be stirred by the cannon's roar; and I said, in a tone of energy and decision, that startled even myself: 'Send me to Hopedale, too. I must, I will go there!' They tried to reason with me; they told me that I was too sick, that the journey would certainly kill me, but it was all of no avail. Hopedale! the very word suggested the hope of hearing from my long-lost daughter, and besides it brought vividly to my mind the recollection of that daughter's mother. Yes, I would go back to Hopedale, the scene of my youthful love and happiness, and would go to rest where I had sought and won the wife of my youth."

"You are, then, not altogether a stranger here?"

"A stranger, and yet not a stranger. I cannot feel altogether a stranger in a place so intimately associated with the most sacred memories of my whole life, although I have really never spent more than a few days here, and that was long years ago. It was here that I first saw Lucy Ellsworth."

"Lucy Ellsworth!" shouted Uncle John, springing fiercely from his seat. "Do you tell me that you are the husband of my wife—my wife in promise, and, as I believed, in heart,—my wife in all

save the words of a ceremony? Are you the man that came between me and happiness? who blighted all my life? who——”

In his excitement, Uncle John's eyes glowed with unwonted passion. He forgot the sickness and prostration of the wretched man before him, who, in his helplessness, fairly quailed beneath his burning glance. He forgot everything, except that the man who had taken from him the love that he had valued more than his life was before him, and in his power. But while his eyes were fastened fiercely upon him, they saw a change come over the wan face, which at once recalled him to his better self.

“God have mercy upon me!” he murmured, as pressing his hand upon his forehead he tried to collect his bewildered thoughts and curb his strong passions. It was a great effort, but the habit of long years came to his assistance, and he succeeded. He was urged, too, to control himself by a feeling of alarm, as he saw the fever-glow pass away from the cheeks, and the eyes become glazed and stony. The pulse was nearly gone, and Uncle John, now fairly overcome by his conflicting feelings, as his fingers pressed the wasted wrist, murmured:

“God forgive me! I would do nothing to hasten his end!”

Seizing some brandy, he hastily administered it, and then stood and gently wiped away the cold drops from his forehead, and chafed his hands, and counted his feeble pulse. Never had he been so completely unmanned before. He trembled in every limb, and stood in mute agony, fearing lest every breath might be the last, and lest his own wild passion had quenched that life, which, although now but a feeble spark, was, nevertheless, God-given, and which God alone had the right to extinguish.

After awhile the sick man revived. His pulse beat quicker and fuller, and opening his eyes he saw the look of profound pity and sorrow which was bent upon him.

“Come close,” he whispered, “and give me your hand.”

Uncle John bent down, and felt his hand inclosed in a feeble grasp.

“You have been deeply wronged,” he said, “but you have been as fully avenged. It poisoned her life; sometimes I have thought that it caused her early death. As to myself, the most malignant could not wish me to have suffered more. May God help you to forgive me before I die.”

“Amen!” was the fervent response.

The weary eyelids closed, and the dying man seemed to sleep. Uncle John sat by the bedside with his head leaning upon his hand, and his heart in a wild tumult. The past, with its sad memories, rose vividly before him, and the fervor of his youthful love, and the bitterness of its blight, rushed over his heart as it had

not done in long, long years. One only intensely malignant feeling still lingered in his breast. One human being only in the world his kind and gentle heart had ever hated, and now he, upon whom, in the fury of his disappointment and rage, he had sworn to avenge himself, was here to receive comfort and forgiveness at his hands instead of vengeance, and to have his eyes gently closed by one who had become thus strangely his friend instead of his enemy! No wonder that his feelings were in a wild tumult! When he listened to the feeble prayer that "God would help him to forgive," he longed to say "I do," but he dared not speak to the dying words which might be untrue, and in the wild chaos of his heart he could not tell whether he forgave or not.

He sat very still, and thought long and deeply. Daylight waned, and night found him in the same position, still thinking upon the past; but now his bitter memories had given way to sweet and pleasant ones, and the form and feature of the child-angel seemed to come up from the grave of distant years, and to plead with those childish accents that he never could resist, and with those well-remembered tones of persuasion, that he would forgive her dying father.

When the quiet of deep repose rested upon all the world, the dying man began gently to sink in a repose deeper still. Uncle John just caught the words, "Can you forgive?" and the child-angel seemed to say, "Can you refuse?"

Uncle John grasped the cold, clammy hand, and said, in a choking voice:

"God is my witness, that I forgive you from the very bottom of my heart!"

A pressure of the hand, and a whispered, but earnest, "Thank you," was the only response. After a little while he spoke again, but the words were slow and labored:

"My child—if you ever find her, will you be kind to her?"

Again the picture of the child-angel came before him, bright, innocent, and happy, and it needed no effort to promise:

"I will, so help me God!"

"God bless you!—God bless——"

A long-drawn, labored sigh, a flutter of the pulse, and all was still, profoundly still.

Uncle John gently closed the eyes, gazed a moment upon the features quietly settling down into the repose of death, then seating himself beside the lifeless clay, his whole frame shook with the emotions and the tears which he would have been either more or less than man if he could have restrained.

The next morning, a bounding, rushing step was arrested, and

a merry voice was hushed, as Eva, with a magnificent bouquet for Willie, sprang into the hall and was met by Uncle John's pale and haggard face. Unaccustomed to see it otherwise than lighted up by a smile, she stopped short in silent amazement.

Julia followed, and seeing at once that something was sadly wrong, she went up to him, and taking his hand, said, anxiously:

"Something distresses you, Uncle John."

"Come here, my daughters, both of you."

They followed him into the darkened parlor. He led them to the couch, and with an arm around each, he said:

"There lies the man who blighted my early life: who took from me the heart and the affection that I prized more than all else on earth besides, and nearly drove me to that desperation from which his own little child, the child-angel that I once told you about, afterwards saved me. My children, all my life long I have hated that man; all my life I have intended to avenge myself if it should ever be in my power; but, thank God, who has changed my wicked purpose, and instead of an avenger has made me minister to him in sickness and suffering! Last night, upon his dying bed, I forgave him the deep wrong that he had done me, and now my heart is emptied of all its hate."

They turned and went away, and, as Uncle John closed the door after them, Julia said:

"Uncle John, I never knew before that you could hate anybody."

"Yes, daughter, I both could and did. It is true that I have not for many years felt toward him the rancorous hatred of my youth, but never have I felt that I could sincerely and heartily forgive that wrong until last night. But the feeling is all gone now, and, thank God! it was all gone before he died."

Uncle John thought long and sadly of the strange destiny that had linked the fate of his child-angel to George Cameron, and that had decreed her heart to suffer the same blight which she had so unconsciously soothed and comforted in him; and for days he found himself constantly wondering if she, too, had ever found a comforter. But Uncle John never spoke of it.

"This secret," he said, "shall rest in the grave with the lips that uttered it, and never through me shall father or sister learn that still another crime was added to the long list of the sadly fallen son and brother."

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE JOHN was right in supposing that Charles Beaufort had been constantly busy since the battle of Manassas. At first it was incessant toil night and day; toil, too, of the most exhausting kind, since it was a call not only upon his bodily energies, but also upon the sympathies of a nature which had not yet learned to look with indifference upon human suffering. Officers and soldiers were now resting, in order to repair their wasted strength; but for him it was constant anxiety, constant attention, constant watching. He often thought longingly of Cameron Hall, of Uncle John's quiet home, and of the blind child's sweet music, and he would sometimes shut his eyes for a moment upon the scenes around him, and go in spirit whither he could not go in reality. His present life was a perpetual struggle between his feelings and his duty, and while the antagonism could not make him neglect or falter in his duty, still it made it proportionably wearing and burdensome.

He was sitting under a tree, not far from his tent, one hot August afternoon, carving with his knife, upon a large wooden cross, the name of one of his young friends who had fallen in the battle. It was by no means an unwelcome task, though the thoughts awakened by it must necessarily have been sad; and Charles was so deeply absorbed, that he did not hear an approaching footstep, and was aroused by a voice close at hand, which said:

"Are you almost done, doctor?" and Walter threw himself, with a yawn, upon the ground in the shade.

"I am glad that it is you, Walter, for, when I heard your voice, I thought of course that it was a summons to the hospital, and sometimes I quite despair of ever finishing my work. I have been to-day called away three times while trying to cut a single letter; but I am at last nearly done. Any news in camp to-day?"

"No. Oh, yes! I did hear something, too. There is a suspicion afloat that we had a spy in camp yesterday. I think that I must have seen the fellow, and I only wish that I had had a suspicion of the truth. I would like no better fun than to capture a spy. I would as soon do it as to storm a fort."

"Do you think this last a very amusing job, Walter?"

"Oh! I mean for the *éclat* of the thing. To storm fortifications, or to take a battery, is always recorded as an instance of

great valor. I do not think it would read badly in the newspapers, that 'Walter Cameron, private of Company C, — Virginia Regiment, succeeded yesterday in bringing in to headquarters a spy whom he had captured. On his person were found maps of the fortifications, a plan of the encampment, etc. For this distinguished service the gallant youth has received the thanks of the commanding general, etc. etc.' Don't you think that sounds pretty well, doctor?"

"Yes, Walter," he replied, smiling, "it sounds well enough; and if the deed only kept pace with the sound, it would be a happy result. But you have not caught the spy yet. Why don't you go about it, if you think it such a pastime?"

"He has disappeared; at least nobody seems to have seen him since yesterday evening."

"Then, if you have let him escape, of course you cannot expect to read that account of the brilliant achievement which you think sounds so well."

"But perhaps he is not really gone. He may still be lingering about to gain more perfect information. I intend to keep my eyes wide open and on the look-out. Zounds! I wish that I could catch him! It would be capital fun!"

"Capital fun after it is safely done, Walter, but perhaps not in the doing. Spies generally carry that about them which secures them against an easy capture. It requires some skill and address to do the thing neatly and effectually. When did you hear from Hopedale?"

"I had a long letter to-day from Eva—just such a letter as you would expect that madcap to write: half tearful in the beginning, at the dangers encountered by her dear brother, and at the end wildly jubilant because he has escaped unhurt. It is a famous letter, just like a cordial to a fellow in camp. It is a life-like picture of home; and in it she has so mixed up father and sister, Mammy Nancy and Tom, Carlo, and Wildfire and Rebel, that it is difficult to decide which occupies the prominent place in her esteem and affections. Heigh-ho! I would like to be back again at the old Hall, hunting, with Carlo at my heels. It would be much better fun shooting at birds and squirrels than at Yankees. I am too tender-hearted yet, doctor, to make a soldier. Do you know that every time the command was given to fire, the other day in the battle, while I wanted to kill as many Yankees as I could, for that was what I joined the army for, yet, whenever I remembered that they were human beings, I shuddered involuntarily, and was truly thankful that if I did kill anybody I would never know it?"

"You need not be ashamed of the feeling, Walter, nor need

you ever desire to become less tender-hearted. It is not a brutal indifference to human suffering that constitutes a good soldier. He may not shrink from his duty, and may yet look with profound pity and regret upon the sufferings which necessarily result from its faithful performance. But what did Miss Eva say of your father and sister?"

"My father is in his usual health, and in his usual state of anxiety about the country. She says that he has grown older in appearance, even since I saw him three months ago. She gives an amusing account of the manner in which they spent the day, awaiting news from me, and, by-the-way, sends a special message of thanks to you for what in her enthusiasm she chooses to call your 'blessed telegram.' Poor Eva! she is not fitted for trouble and anxiety."

"And what of your other sister?" inquired Charles.

"Eva says that she is always more or less depressed now, though she is as unselfish as ever, and tries to be cheerful for my father's sake. Eva thinks that she partakes of his anxiety about the country and about me; and as she is so mature and thoughtful, I suppose that this is the true explanation. She says, however, that now she has both her mind and her time fully occupied in attending to a young wounded soldier, who has been removed from town to the Hall."

"Who is he?" asked Charles, quickly. "Is he an old acquaintance?"

"No, he is a stranger. Eva supposes him to be about my age, and amuses herself greatly at the maternal care that sister bestows upon him, and at the gentle but firm way in which she enforces her authority. She says that she is constantly expecting to hear Willie call her 'Mother Julia.' I don't know what would become of that child if she could not make fun of sister!"

Charles worked away quietly and industriously at his carving, relieved to hear of the maternal and filial relationship and feeling existing between Julia and the object of her care. He asked many questions, which Walter answered with unsuspecting frankness, and thus he gained much information with regard to Julia which he could have had in no other way. It refreshed him to hear about her; and though her life was quiet and uneventful to the last degree, and though she had assured him that it was useless for him to cherish any interest in it, still the interest was there, and as he could not crush it, he would not refuse to gratify it by listening to these simple home-details.

After he had exhausted the news from the Hall, Charles asked:

"Did your sister mention Uncle John?"

"Yes; she says that he is very busy attending to the comfort of the wounded, both at the hospital and at his own house. She says also that he is both surprised and anxious that he does not hear from you, and thinks that there must be some grave reason for your silence."

"No graver one than the want of time, which of course neither he nor any one else not actually on the ground can ever realize. I have not had time since the battle to sleep, much less to write; and the two brief letters that I have sent home were written when I felt that I ought to be doing something else. However, if it is possible, I must write to Uncle John. I will try and do so to-night."

"Then," said Walter, rising, "I suppose that you have no message to send him in the letter that I am going now to write. I cannot, like you, wait until night, for then I am so tired and stupid, with the drill and camp-work, that I am fit for nothing but—bed, I was going to say, but I beg the soldier's pardon—I mean fit for nothing but to stretch my blanket upon the ground, and myself upon the blanket. It is astonishing how sweetly and soundly a fellow can sleep upon the ground! So good-by, doctor! No message, I suppose?"

"Not for Uncle John, for I shall write to him myself; but for your father and sisters," he added, with a slight hesitation, "my kindest regards."

Walter strolled leisurely away, whistling "Dixie," and his companion sat and thought how different was the message of his lips from that in his heart. He had now put the finishing touches to the last figure in the date, 1861.

Charles was sorry to have completed his task. It had occupied his every leisure moment for more than two weeks, and he had become almost attached to this rude memorial, all that was left him now of a friend whom he had sincerely loved. He was about to lay it aside as finished, when he suddenly thought of filling a vacant space, still left, with a few words of Scripture. It would be appropriate, and it would prolong his work. He took Julia's prayer-book from his pocket, to select a verse from the burial psalter; it opened at the fly-leaf, the edge of which he saw was neatly folded down all around. The sight of that book always awakened memories both painful and perplexing; and now, while his thoughts were in an instant busy with that last night at the Hall, he mechanically turned the edge back and smoothed it down carefully. Two leaves now revealed themselves, and, with the edges thus folded, had formed a safe receptacle for three or four small and faded flowers, which now fell out upon the cross which was lying beside him. They were remembrancers of Julia,

and he took them up carefully to restore them to their place, when, as he opened the leaves, a date in pencil-mark attracted his attention.

Immediately, as at the touch of the enchanter's wand, the scene around him was obliterated, and in its stead arose, with the distinctness of present reality, that well-remembered Sunday evening at the Springs, two years before. He looked with sincere pleasure upon those withered flowers, a memento of past enjoyment, and at the same time, as he could not but hope, a pledge of future happiness, for they bore silent but unmistakable witness to feelings which her actions could not deny. Whatever might be the motives that now actuated her, whatever might be that insurmountable obstacle of which she had spoken, of this at least he was now assured, that it could not be indifference to him.

Young men in the vigor of their mental and physical strength are prone to despise obstacles, and to regard them as only giving zest to effort; and it is not to be wondered at, if Charles, in the enjoyment of this unexpected discovery, should have deemed all difficulties as trifles, and should have determined that, in the pursuit of this, his greatest earthly happiness, he would acknowledge no such thing as failure. Her own indifference was the only thing that he really feared, and to which he would have consented to yield. Now he was assured that this did not exist; and looking with gratitude, nay, almost with reverence, upon those little faded flowers, he resolved that nothing but death should separate him from Julia. He was willing to await her time; willing, if he could not himself remove the obstacle, to wait, if she so decreed it, until its removal should be effected by other hands or other means; but he now felt a strange strength, a buoyancy and determination of purpose, a strange expectation of final success, which was altogether disproportioned to the cause that produced it.

It was a pleasant reverie, and one from which he did not care to be awakened; but his dreams of future happiness were instantly exchanged for the waking realities of his present life, as a voice at his side said:

"You is wanted at the hospital, Master Charles."

He started, and hastily closed the book upon the flowers, afraid that they might prove the tell-tale to his thoughts; but he smiled at his own confusion, as he turned and saw only the black face of "Hospital Jim."

Jim stood by, quietly eating a mammoth ginger-cake, quite unconscious of his proximity to those withered flowers which the young master so jealousy concealed, and quite incapable of appreciating their value if he had seen them.

Charles felt a strange repugnance to having any other eyes see those flowers; so, holding the book tightly, he replied:

"Very well, Jim. Go on, I will be at the hospital before you get there."

"No, sir," he replied, doggedly. "I was told not to come back without the doctor; so I'll jest wait here till you gits ready to go."

He leaned back against the tree, busy with his cake, perfectly contented with his occupation, and altogether indifferent whether the surgeon should respond to his call in five minutes or five hours. The only thing on which he seemed positively determined was not to go without him.

Charles saw this, and so he said:

"Jim, take this cross and put it in my tent, and then I will go with you."

Jim took an enormous mouthful of cake—enough, as he thought, to last him to the doctor's tent, and, putting the rest into his pocket, shouldered the cross and left it where he was told. By the time that he returned, the flowers had been replaced, and three others just like them, and tied by a blade of grass, had been transferred from a private memorandum book and added to them; the leaves had been folded down as before, and the prayer-book restored to Charles's pocket; and now, followed leisurely by Jim, he hurried off, as ready to use the surgeon's knife as if his heart were impervious to the softer feelings, as if he had never lingered fondly over a withered flower, or cherished a lover's dream in his life.

That night, when all the stirring sounds of the camp were hushed, he wrote a long letter to Uncle John. In it there was, as Julia had commanded, neither mention of her nor allusion to her; and yet Charles felt singularly near to her while he was writing, and lingered over the letter to his old bachelor friend, almost as he might have done if he had been writing to Julia herself. Never, since the night that he left Cameron Hall, had he felt so cheerful and contented as he did now; and when he laid him down to sleep, his soldier rest was made sweeter by dreams of Julia; and when he awoke the next morning, his first sensations were so pleasurable that he stopped to wonder what made them so; and he could not repress a feeling of disappointment, when he remembered that his castle of hope and happiness had only the slender foundation of a withered flower. But while he could not but acknowledge that his hope had a most unsubstantial basis, still the hope was there; and with a lighter heart and a more elastic step than he had had since he had been in

camp, he left his tent and went to the hospital to the performance of his morning duties.

As he went along, shouts and peals of merry laughter from a distance reached his ears. Charles sighed, and thought:

"It is well for the soldier that his heart can so easily rebound and so readily forget. Poor fellows! let them enjoy themselves while they can; it may not be long before some of them will exchange the laugh for the sigh, the merry jest for the groan of agony!"

Again the air rang with laughter, of which Walter Cameron was the cause, and in which he joined as heartily as any of the rest. It was his turn to cook for the mess; and as his whole acquaintance with culinary science had been acquired solely by seeing its results upon his father's luxurious table, the boys were sure to enjoy themselves greatly at his expense whenever he was cook. Fortunately for himself, however, Walter had soon learned to take a joke good-humoredly; and he generally enjoyed as much as any of the rest the merriment occasioned by his own failures. Heretofore he had always experimented on biscuits, which, after his best efforts, his comrades invariably pronounced it a great pity to eat, since, "in case the ammunition should fail some time, Cameron's biscuits might save the day." And since he had been so uniformly unsuccessful in this species of bread, Walter had concluded this time to try another kind, and he had ventured upon a loaf. Forgetful, or perhaps ignorant that "*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*," he had put in an extra quantity; and now, when he was ready to commence baking, he found, to his dismay, that his dough, disdaining to be confined to the narrow limits that he had assigned, had broken through all restraints, and, in a state of vigorous fermentation, was spreading rapidly all over the ground. He looked at it for a moment in blank amazement; but seeing that there was no time to be lost, he hailed one of his comrades at a little distance, and called out:

"Hallo, Nelson! Come quick! There is a perfect eruption going on here!"

Thus summoned, young Nelson came with all speed; and when he saw the cause of Walter's consternation, and his attitude of helpless surprise, he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. Walter, perplexed as he was, could not help joining him; and Nelson, perceiving at once what was the matter, resolved to have another joke at his friend's expense. So he said nothing, but laughed on; and presently Walter asked:

"Nelson, what under the sun is the matter with the thing?"

"Thing!" exclaimed Nelson. "It is no thing, but a real live animal, the like of which I never saw before! Look at it, work-

ing and squirming there all over the ground. Let's call help, Cameron, to capture the varmint, or it will soon run all over the camp!"

"Nelson, what under the heavens can be the matter with my bread?" said Walter, fairly shouting with laughter.

"Bread, Cameron! You don't want to make me believe that that wriggling, twisting mass there is meant for bread! I would as soon have a Yankee bullet through my brain as to have such active bread as that wandering about in my stomach at that rate!" and Nelson went to the door and called loudly:

"Hallo, fellows! quick, quick!"

The summons was answered at the double quick, one of them stopping to seize his musket; and when they reached the tent, they were surprised to find no cause of alarm.

"What is the matter?" asked one, breathlessly.

"Nothing that your musket can remedy," answered Nelson. "Part of Cameron's dough there has seceded, that is all; so put up your gun, man, for muskets and bullets won't remedy secession."

"Well, Nelson, if something don't remedy it, it will soon all secede at that rate," he answered, looking at the dough still stealing over the sides of the bucket and along the ground. "I think your breakfast bread 'has gone up the spout.' Is there no way of stopping it?"

"None that I know. Perhaps Cameron can do something; he set it going."

Attracted by the peals of laughter, quite a crowd was soon gathered around the unconscious bread, which still worked on.

"What are you going to do with it, Cameron?" asked one.

"If it ever gets over its present excitement, I propose to bake it for breakfast."

"Well, the Lord help the soldier who eats that bread! It will save the Yankees one bullet. Government and government agents seem to think that soldiers' stomachs are made of India-rubber; but that bread would puzzle even their digestion!"

"Cameron, what did you do to it, man?" asked another. "Where did you discover that principle of life that it seems to have?"

"If I have discovered it," answered Walter, "I must acknowledge that it was like most other wonderful discoveries, purely accidental. I cannot claim it to be the result either of profound research or of great culinary skill. To tell the truth, fellows," he added, laughing, "I am puzzled at my own performance, and, like some dabbler in the black art, I have raised up a power that I cannot control."

"Come, Cameron," said Nelson, "tell us how you compounded that wonderful bread? Give us your recipe now."

"Indeed, Nelson, I shall do no such thing," replied Walter. "Who knows but that, if I keep my secret, I may yet make a fortune at bread-making? Perhaps, when the Confederacy is established, I will take out a patent for my recipe."

"Thar'll be one vote agin that, if I'm thar," said a rough old fellow in a butternut suit. "I'll tell 'em that I was present at Cameron's first bread-making, and that I can swear that the devil had a finger in it!"

"Cameron's recipe! Cameron's recipe!" was now loudly called for by several voices.

"I cannot tell all my secret, gentlemen," he answered; "but this much I will tell you, that I used the very same materials that are used at home for bread,—flour, yeast, and water."

"Do you eat bread like that at your home, mister?" inquired he of the butternut suit. "I wouldn't, on no account, eat such restless food!"

Again there was a shout, and when it had subsided, Walter replied:

"I cannot tell you, squire, whether or not the bread at home is as restless as mine when it is in the same stage of manufacture. I only know that when it comes on the table it is quiet enough; but it may be that the cooking process has something to do with that."

"Give us the proportions, Cameron," said Nelson. "How much flour did you take?"

"Three quarts."

"How much leaven?"

"I had no leaven, so I put in a strong tea made from a double handful of hops."

"The Lord defend us!" exclaimed the old man. "If the boy didn't put enough yeast in that batch of bread to make a loaf as big as the Confederacy! We needn't fight no more, boys. Just let that young fellow's bread alone, and you will soon hear of an invasion of Yankeedom; and it can overrun it without any help from us!"

"It would be better than grape and canister to kill off Yankees, if we could only manage to feed their army on it," said Nelson. "Walter, suppose that you apply for a situation as chief cook at Pope's or McDowell's headquarters; you will serve your country better in that way than you will by handling the musket."

Walter now began to weary of the joke, but there was no escape, and for half an hour longer they kept up a merciless fire of merriment at his expense. At last Nelson said:

"Cameron, is that bread our only hope for breakfast?"

"That is all," replied Walter; "and if you can't help me to doctor it somehow, you will have to breakfast on fried meat and coffee, for it is too late to make any other bread now. By-the-way, Nelson, you have had your fun at my expense: it is but fair that you should help me cook breakfast to pay for it. If there hadn't been all this hubbub here this morning, it would have been ready now. The boys will be coming in from picket-duty presently, as hungry as wolves, and you know that they don't wait very patiently."

"I am very willing to help you about anything except that bread. That is your own manufacture, and I will not consent to rob you of any of the laurels gained thereby. I will cook the meat and make the coffee, and you may manage the bread."

So saying, he went immediately to work, and the crowd, thinking that the fun was over, soon dispersed.

"Is there anything that I can do to it, Nelson?" asked Walter, shaking his head disconsolately as he removed the cover from the bucket and looked in. "No human being can eat it as it is. It smells as sour as vinegar, and how must it taste?"

Nelson was not yet satisfied with the joke, and he answered, demurely:

"I recollect having learned in chemistry that an alkali would neutralize an acid, and I know that this principle is sometimes acted on in cooking; for I have heard my mother send word to the cook, when the cakes or muffins were sour, to put soda into the batter. Now, as the dough is sour, perhaps soda would remedy it and make it all right."

"That is the very thing, Nelson!" exclaimed Walter, eagerly seizing the suggestion. "I wonder that I did not think of that myself, for I have often heard sister send word to Aunt Sally that the buckwheat cakes were sour, and needed a little soda, and when the next came in I could not taste a particle of acid. Hurrah for the soda! My bread will be eatable yet, thanks to you, Nelson."

He bounded off, and soon returned with a half-pound package of soda. Nelson busied himself with the meat and coffee, stealing an occasional glance at his companion, who was now once more greatly interested in his bread. The greater part had made its escape from the bucket, and there was not much dough left on which to experiment.

"How must I mix in the soda, Nelson, by kneading it?"

"I should think that it would be best to dissolve it in water; otherwise it will be in lumps all through the bread."

A cup-full of water was speedily brought, and Nelson could

scarcely repress a shout of laughter, as, stealing a glance from under his eyebrows, he saw Walter empty the half pound of soda into the cup, stir it round, and toss the whole into the dough.

"Now knead it a little, Cameron," he said.

Walter rolled up his sleeves, and worked away vigorously at it a few minutes, and then said :

"I cannot waste any more time on it, for I am afraid that, with all possible haste, it will not be done by the time that the boys come. Is the oven hot, Nelson?"

"I should think it was!" he answered, drawing it out of the fire, red hot. "What on earth, man, made you bury the oven in the fire that way? Now you will have to wait at least half an hour for it to cool, before you can put your bread in. It would burn to a cinder in ten minutes in such an oven as that."

"I want it hot," replied Walter. "The bread must bake quickly; there is no time to spare."

"Well, it is your bread, and you know best," rejoined Nelson.

"Do you think that it is really too hot, Nelson?" asked Walter, pointing to the oven glowing like a furnace. "I am in a terrible hurry."

"It is too hot now, Walter. I would wait a little while, if I were in your place."

Walter sighed impatiently, and began to walk up and down, looking one moment to see if the boys were coming, and the next to see if the oven still looked red. Just so soon as the bright glow had subsided, and the oven had resumed its natural color, the unfortunate dough was put in, covered up, and consigned to its fate.

"How long does bread require to bake?" he asked.

"Such a loaf as that ought to be allowed from a half to three-quarters of an hour, I should think."

"Oh! but the oven is so hot that less time will do for this; don't you think so?"

"Probably it will," was the quiet response.

It did not require much time to arrange the table-service. The tincups and plates were soon placed, and when the two boys for whom they had been waiting arrived, Nelson said, placing the coffee-pot and the meat upon the table :

"Now for the bread, Walter! We are all ready."

The oven was uncovered, and revealed a charred loaf as black as a similar memorial of Pompeii's fate, which the traveler sees in the museum at Naples.

"What is the matter, Cameron?" exclaimed Nelson, as he saw his messmate lingering in silent dismay over the oven.

"My bread is burned to a coal," he replied, solemnly.

"Never mind," said Nelson, "bring it along. Perhaps it is only the outer crust that is burned."

"Hurry along with the bread, Cameron!" called out one of the mess. "Never mind a little burn, man. We will not be particular this morning, for we are very hungry."

The loaf was brought, as dolorous and gloomy a specimen of bread as was ever placed before hungry men. Nelson laughed quietly, as he said:

"Tolerably well cooked, Cameron! Well, charcoal is said to be good for dyspepsia! How is it inside, Mat?" he asked of a young fellow who was vainly trying to make an impression upon it with a knife.

"I cannot storm these fortifications with a knife," he replied. "If you will go to headquarters, Nelson, and borrow a pickaxe, perhaps I can show you how the inside looks; but nothing less than that will make an impression here. I give it up," he said, pushing it away.

"Let me try, said Nelson, who was determined that they should not only look at, but also taste the result of a mixture of a quart of yeast with half a pound of soda.

He took a stone, and with a sharp blow upon the knife succeeded in penetrating the crust; and after having cut two or three slices, he placed the plate in the center of the table, saying, with quiet gravity:

"Here it is, gentlemen. In military parlance, I have stormed the outer works. I leave you to attack the citadel."

If the charred crust of the loaf was uninviting, it offered a tempting looking morsel compared with the black, heavy, unbaked dough, which Nelson styled the citadel. But hungry soldiers do not stop for appearances, and one of them, helping himself to two slices, said:

"It does not look very inviting, certainly; but perhaps it tastes better than it looks. At any rate I will try it."

He suited the action to the word, and a piece large enough for two ordinary mouthfuls found its way into his mouth. In an instant, as if touched by a galvanic battery, he sprang from his seat, and furiously ejecting the intolerable mouthful, he exclaimed:

"By Heaven! I am poisoned!"

Nelson jumped up from the table, and clapping his hands, shouted and screamed. This time Walter did not join in the laugh, for he was now heartily tired of furnishing merriment for the camp.

"Confess it, Cameron!" exclaimed Nelson. "Sold this time! Mat," he added, turning round to the young fellow, who was

rinsing his mouth, "is the bread sour, or has the soda realized Cameron's expectations, and corrected the acidity?"

"Sour!" repeated Mat. "I don't know; but this much I can tell you, that no Christian man ever before put such a villainous compound into his mouth. It might have been concocted in a witch's cauldron. If I had swallowed that morsel, my stomach would have had no coats on it by this time. What in the thunder was it meant for, Nelson,—bread?"

"Yes, it was Cameron's first attempt at bread-making. He only made a slight mistake, by putting in enough yeast to make about fifty loaves of the same size; and then, by way of correcting the acidity, he added soda enough to have neutralized fifty times the amount of acid. I hope, however, that the next time he attempts to make bread he will succeed better."

"Amen!" said Mat, making a wry face at the taste, which still lingered in his mouth; and then, rising from the table, he proceeded with great gravity to collect every crumb of the so-called bread.

As he started off with it, Nelson called out:

"Where are you going, Mat?"

"To bury Cameron's bread!" he answered, gravely. "I don't intend that any living thing, man or beast, shall ever taste such a morsel as I did just now. I swear, Nelson, it would kill a turkey-buzzard!"

He went off, and left Nelson laughing. Presently he said:

"Walter, you are too extravagant a cook. Our mess cannot afford such lavish use of materials. Just think of the yeast and soda that you have consumed for one meal! You must learn to economize before your turn comes round again."

"I hope, Nelson," answered Walter, gravely, "that before that time I will have somebody to cook in my place, who will be less extravagant and more successful. I shall write to my father to-day and tell him to send me a servant. I can do the fighting well enough, but the cooking is beyond my comprehension!"

CHAPTER XIX.

As Eva had written to her brother, Willie was already quite domesticated at the Hall, and Julia was glad to find a refuge from her thoughts in her busy care of him. She occupied herself with him more than his comfort positively required, and the

homesick youth found, in the comfort around him, in the kindness of Mr. Cameron, and the attention and companionship of the sisters, something so nearly akin to home, that he deemed it no great sacrifice to bear cheerfully and patiently the pain that he at times still suffered. His room was always adorned with the choicest and sweetest flowers; his couch was placed by a window which opened down to the floor and looked out upon a picturesque scene of cultivated fields mingled with woodland, and a background of mountains, and he had access at all times either to agreeable companions or to pleasant books.

"Lucky fellow!" he thought, as he glanced around and contrasted the luxurious comfort and quiet of his room with the noise and discomfort of the hospital. "How shall I ever be thankful enough to the old gentleman who sent me here, and to those who take such good care of me! Such kindness is enough to make a soldier of a fellow; and if he may expect to find, in sickness and suffering, a mother or sister in every woman that he meets, then indeed the Southern women will find an army ready to fight their battles, nerved and strung to conquer or die! I know that, when I go into battle again, the thought of Cameron Hall will mingle with that of home, and I will fight as much for one as for the other."

"Willie," said Julia, coming in with a vase of flowers, which she placed on a little table beside his couch, "what message for your mother this morning? You are doing so well that I shall be able to write quite an encouraging letter, and I think I may venture to tell her that the air of Cameron Hall promises to restore you to your regiment before long."

"Not the air, Miss Julia, but the kindness and gentle nursing of the Hall. Tell my mother to dismiss all anxiety about me, for never was a young soldier so well cared for before. Even she herself could not do it better."

"You are mistaken, there, Willie. I do not know it by experience, but I have always heard, and I believe, that no touch can be so gentle, no look so soothing, no care so delicate, as a mother's."

She paused a moment, and then added, thoughtfully:

"All my life I have wanted a mother, but never, never so much as now!"

Had Willie known Julia better, he would have been surprised at this involuntary confession; but he did not know how reserved she generally was with regard to all that concerned herself, nor did he know that she had now spoken almost unconsciously. He felt that she had voluntarily offered him the privilege of sympathizing with her; and that if she was in trouble, as her words

seemed to indicate, a quiet indifference and unconcern on his part would be but a poor return for all the kindness that he had received from her; so he said, gently:

"Why have you felt the need of a mother so much of late, Miss Julia? Have you had any special trouble?"

His words recalled her to herself, and she answered, evasively:

"I think, Willie, that the older a motherless daughter grows, the more she must feel the need of a mother's guidance, advice, and companionship; but besides this, I have of late felt so much anxiety about Walter. If we had a mother, you know that I would only have to feel for him a sister's affection and concern; but, as it is, I must be to him mother as well as sister."

"He is a lucky boy," replied Willie, earnestly, "to have a sister so capable of being both! I'll warrant that he has never felt the want of a mother."

"You must not say that, Willie. Fortunately for you, you do not and cannot know the feeling of a motherless child; if you did, you would know that it is a want, a void, a yearning of the heart which nothing can fill or satisfy."

"If I did not have exactly the feeling, I came pretty near it in the hospital. No motherless boy ever felt more forlorn or orphaned than I did there. I was so desolate, that once or twice I lost all my manliness and became a very baby. I am afraid that Uncle John thinks me but a sorry soldier, with none of that stern stuff about me to make me fit for the camp and the battlefield."

"That is the error, Willie, into which boys of the age of Walter and yourself are apt to fall; and if you foster such notions, the effects of the soldier's life upon your character will be lamentable indeed. To be a soldier, you need not, you must not cease to be a man! You must not think that you are not fit to be a soldier until you have crushed all the humanity out of your heart, and steeled it, if not to enjoy, at least to be indifferent to human suffering. No, Willie! ever struggle against the hardening process; ever remember that, if you would be a true, good, valuable soldier, one who will neither disgrace your profession by brutality, nor yet falter in your duty to your country, you must foster and keep alive all that is gentle and tender and human in your nature. I can mention now one such soldier in our army. I doubt not that there are many more, but him I know personally; I allude to General Robert E. Lee. Papa and Uncle John know him well; and I have heard them say that there is no man in the country who combines so many soldierly qualities, and that if he lives, and this war lasts two or three years, he will certainly make for himself an enviable name in history. Now, if you should

ever know General Lee as I do, you will find out for yourself that no woman ever had a kinder, gentler heart, one more overflowing with those softer feelings, which, instead of being a blemish upon manhood, are rather its glory and its crown. Don't covet, Willie, that 'sterner stuff' which, in the ears of boys and youths, sounds so manly; to be a true man, and therefore a true soldier, needs the development of human characteristics instead of those that belong to the brutes."

"Preaching a sermon to Willie, as I live!" exclaimed Eva, who now entered the door, on the threshold of which she had been standing for several minutes. "What was the text, Willie? Unfortunately I came too late for that. I only heard what papa says the old-fashioned preachers used to call 'the practical application and improvement of the subject.'"

Willie could not help laughing, although he did not exactly know how Julia would take this pleasant ridicule, but she soon reassured him, by saying:

"I am perfectly accustomed to it, Willie. As I have to be a mother, as I told you just now, to these children, there is scarcely a day, especially when she and Walter are together, that I am not obliged to administer a reproof or to give some advice, which is always received with a laugh, and placed in the category of 'sister's sermons;' but I must do the children the justice to say that it is generally remembered and acted upon afterward. So, if you will follow their example in the one case, you shall have the privilege of doing so in the other. You shall laugh at my 'sermon' just as much as you please, if you will promise to remember it."

"I will, Miss Julia, and I thank you for the lesson. We boys are always prone to be ashamed of anything that looks womanly, and especially is this temptation great in the army. And Eva," he added, laughing, "if your sister does preach, you must admit that she has what the critics would call 'a very agreeable manner in the pulpit.'"

"I am perfectly willing to acknowledge that, Willie; but the greatest recommendation of all is that sister's sermons are always short. She has not adopted the old Cameronian style of 'sixteenthly' and 'seventeenthly,' but what she has to say, she puts into a few words and is done with it."

"Well, Willie, said Julia, "I will leave you and Eva to criticise at your leisure my powers of sermonizing. I did not intend to stay a moment when I came in; and if I do not go now and make haste with my letter to your mother, I will not have it ready for the mail."

After she had left the room, Willie said:

"Eva, you ought not to tease so good a sister."

“Why, bless you, Willie, she couldn’t live without it! Uncle John often tells me that if I hadn’t sister to tease I would die; but I think that it is exactly the other way. She is so quiet that she needs stirring up now and then; and I really believe that if she did not have me to worry her, and to give her somebody to preach to and advise, the quiet of her life would amount to positive stagnation. Indeed, Willie,” she added, laughing, “sister owes me a debt of gratitude that she can never repay, and the most provoking part of it is that she does not seem even conscious of the obligation! I act as a sort of moral mustard-plaster, and keep up just enough excitement and irritation in her nature to produce a healthful action. You ought to see her sometimes, when Carlo and I come racing into the hall together, Carlo leaving his muddy tracks all over the floor which has just been polished, and I, with my hair all down, my face glowing like a poppy, and a rent across one whole breadth of my dress. You ought to hear her sermon then, and how eloquently she discourses upon ladylike manners, propriety, and dignity; and how forcibly she illustrates it by the striking contrast of the present scene. But if the words and manner of the lecturer upon such occasions are remarkable, not less so is the penitent aspect of the culprit, who listens demurely, but in her heart is all the while longing for just such another romp. I must get up one of these scenes for your special benefit, Willie; they are decidedly rich. So you must neither be shocked nor amazed; above all, you must not be so startled as to move from your position, and set your wound to bleeding, if some of these days, when you and sister are having a proper ladylike conversation, Carlo and I should come bounding into the room with little ceremony and less dignity, and I should present an appearance by no means suitable for the sister of Miss Julia Cameron, and by no means creditable to Cameron Hall.”

“I don’t think, Eva, that these frolics, and the lectures consequent thereupon, can be of very frequent occurrence. I have been here now nearly two weeks, and nothing of the kind has happened during that time, or, if it has, it has not disturbed the quiet of my room.”

“No, indeed! I had my instructions on that point before you came. Sister, as I told you, never preaches long sermons; but when she considers the subject of great practical importance, she sometimes gives me the benefit of two or three at different times from the same text. Now I assure you that, for days before you came, I was told how I was to behave: ‘that I must act in a manner becoming my father’s daughter; that I must remember that you were not Walter, but a stranger, etc. etc.’ I must confess

that all these arguments weighed but little with me ; but when she finished by saying that I must not forget that you were sick, and were brought from the hospital to enjoy here the repose and quiet which were necessary, and which you could not have there, and that I must walk more quietly through the house, and not sing at the top of my voice, and, in short, not make any unnecessary noise, that was an argument that I could appreciate ; and it is to this that you owe the remarkable fact that Carlo and I have not had a romp either in the house or near it since you have been here. I confess, however, Willie, that it has nearly been the death of me to play lady so long ! Even Carlo is surprised, and looks at me in the most earnest, inquiring manner, as if to say, 'What upon earth can be the matter with my young mistress ?' I trust that you will soon get well enough to bear a little noise, for, indeed, I am afraid that I cannot hold out much longer."

"Pray, Eva," replied Willie, laughing, "don't try to hold out any longer, for, indeed, I am quite as able to bear noises as I ever was in my life ; and even when I first came here, the sounds of merriment would have been by no means unwelcome. It was the sounds of suffering, the groans of the poor fellows around me, that disturbed me at the hospital. So I earnestly protest against being for another moment any restraint upon the freedom or pleasure of either yourself or Carlo."

"Thank you, Willie ! but I am afraid to avail myself of your permission quite yet. If you should have a fever, or should be in any respect worse the day after, sister would always believe that the noise had made you so, and, what is worse, she would convince me so too, and then I should be very much distressed. So I will try and wait a little longer for my romp ; but, indeed, I must stop playing demure and dignified, Willie ; it is too great an effort."

"I am sorry that you ever attempted it, Eva, especially," he added, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, "since the effort was so entirely unsuccessful. If you had not told me, I should never have dreamed that you had been trying to play either demure or dignified."

"Now, Willie," she exclaimed, "that is the unkindest cut of all ! There is nothing so discouraging as to be told of complete failure after a great effort ; and if you thought me unsuccessful, you might at least have spared me the pain of hearing it. But, see here ! I had almost forgotten what I came for. Here is the morning paper, with a long and interesting account of the battle. The details are much fuller than any that we have had before, and I thought that perhaps you would like for me to read them to you."

"And so I would, very much, indeed !"

"Your regiment is spoken of in terms of the highest praise,

and its gallantry is said to have been unsurpassed. The color-bearer, a young Alabamian, is especially commended for the tenacity with which he held his flag after receiving one severe wound, until another, which it was feared would prove mortal, prostrated him. Then, as he fell, a comrade seized the flag, and as he surrendered it, he said: 'Hold it until you die!' That is what I like, Willie," she added, her bright face glowing with enthusiastic admiration; "that is what I call being a soldier, indeed! I hope and trust that his wound will not prove mortal, and I wish that they had sent him to me to take care of; it would be a privilege, indeed, to nurse such a soldier! You are an Alabamian, Willie; perhaps you know him, do you?"

Willie blushed as deeply as any girl, and replied:

"Your wish has been gratified, Eva. You have had what you call the privilege of nursing the young color-bearer from Alabama, and he has had the much greater privilege of receiving such care and attention as seldom falls to the lot of the poor soldier. And if," he added, gratefully, "his wound has not proved mortal, as was expected, it is owing to the gentle and watchful care of the two best nurses in the Southern Confederacy."

It was now Eva's turn to blush crimson, and she was so confused that for several minutes there was an awkward silence. At last, more to break it than from any other reason, she asked:

"Why did you not tell us this before, Willie?"

"I had nothing to tell. I only did my duty; and if I had not, I would not have been any soldier at all. I only did what any other man in the regiment would have done; only what all the other regimental color-bearers did. They were so fortunate as not to be shot down; if I had escaped, as they did, I should not have been mentioned either."

"Come, Willie, it is not fair and just thus to underrate your actions. It must have been something above the common valor of the soldier, or it would not have been thus commented upon among so many acts of bravery. Tell me about it. How did you do?"

"I carried my flag, as I was bound to do, until I could carry it no longer."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Eva. "You are provokingly modest! I wish that I could see an eye-witness, that I might hear from him what you yourself are too bashful to tell me. It is so much pleasanter, so much more like reality, to hear about these scenes from those who were actors in them, than to read newspaper descriptions. But I suppose that I must, in this instance, be contented with the latter."

"I am afraid so," replied Willie, quietly.

"Provoking boy!" she exclaimed; and then, bursting into a merry laugh, she said: "What would sister say, what would she think, if she had heard me call you 'boy'? Indeed, Mr. Willie," she continued, with mock gravity, "you must excuse my thoughtlessness. Hereafter I will try to remember that you are not a common soldier, but the distinguished young color-bearer from Alabama, worthy of mention in the public newspapers; and perhaps, when my own dignity and sense of propriety are not sufficient to induce me to treat you with becoming respect, this will help me to do it. Are you ready now to hear the account of the battle of Manassas?"

Willie expressed his readiness, and Eva read the full details. As she folded up the paper, she asked:

"And now, sir color-bearer, is it a faithful statement of facts with regard to you?"

"It is true," he answered, modestly but truthfully.

"Then you are a brave boy! Excuse me, I meant to say that you are a brave soldier."

Just then Julia came in, with the letter, to read to Willie, and to ask if he wished anything added to it.

"Oh, sister!" exclaimed Eva, "what do you think? Willie proves to be the brave color-bearer from Alabama, spoken of in this paper!"

Julia went up to him, her face sparkling with pleasure, and taking his hand, held it, while she said:

"You were welcome, Willie, as the Confederate soldier, to the hospitalities and attentions of the Hall; you are now thrice welcome, as one who has nobly and bravely done his duty! Surely our country will be free, when her sons, scarcely more than boys, can make such soldiers!"

Willie's dark-blue eyes kindled, and his face glowed, as he answered, in a low tone of emotion:

"And she will always have such soldiers as long as she has such daughters! I have suffered much since I have been wounded, but the lesson that I have learned is worth the pain. When I see the women of our country, reared, as they have been, in luxury, lay aside their ease and pleasure, and cheerfully take their places beside the beds of pain and suffering, I read in this a pledge of success as reliable as the strength of armies; for a nation of such mothers, daughters, and sisters must make an army of invincible soldiers. Think you," he added, with increasing excitement, "that I could ever falter now? that I could abandon my flag, or betray any trust committed to me? If I could, the thought of Cameron Hall and its true Southern hearts would burn my soul with scorching shame! You have made a soldier

of me now ; for now I know that the soldier is not uncared for ; now I know that he is remembered and prayed for in danger, and nursed in suffering ; and this knowledge will nerve my arm with strength and inspire my heart with courage."

"Hush, Willie," said Julia, laying her hand upon his forehead. You must not get excited now, or you may not be able for a long time to bear the colors into battle again. Your cheeks are flushed ; I ought not to have permitted this," she said, anxiously, "indeed I ought not."

"Never mind, Miss Julia, it will not hurt me. I will keep very quiet now, and if I can, I will go to sleep, and when I wake up I will be all right again."

"Please do, Willie," she answered. "Every time that the doctor comes he enjoins perfect quiet as necessary for you ; and if this excitement should give you fever, we would all reproach ourselves very much. Will you promise now to keep perfectly still for the next two hours?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then we will go down and leave you alone. Suppose that I cut this paragraph out of the paper, and inclose it in my letter to your mother ; what do you say, Willie?"

"It will gratify her very much, Miss Julia ; for although she will read it herself in the papers, still she will like to know that her boy has already found, among strangers, friends who take interest enough in him to read a notice like this with pleasure."

"Then I will send it. Come, Eva, take that book lying there on the table, and put it out of Willie's reach. And remember, Willie, that the nurse's commands are imperative. Go to sleep, if you can, and if not, keep perfectly still. If you want anything, ring the bell ; I put it on the table, here, within your reach."

She darkened the room and went down stairs, leaving her patient little inclined to sleep, but very comfortable and happy, and feeling (young soldier that he was) that this brief newspaper encomium, sweet foretaste of the glory that he coveted, was worth the pain and suffering that he had endured.

Julia went to her domestic duties with a heart heavier even than was its wont. Like Uncle John, she too had thought much and anxiously about Charles Beaufort's silence, and had feared that there was some serious reason for it. Her thoughts were now as busy with him as her hands were with her duties, when all at once she was startled by Eva's voice calling through the house :

"Sister ! sister ! where are you ? Uncle John is here, and he has a long letter from Dr. Charles !"

Julia was thankful that Eva's usual impetuosity had commu-

nicated her intelligence while she was still afar off. She was glad to be alone for a minute, that she might still the quickened heart-throb, and let the tell-tale blood have time to regain its quiet flow. She did not answer, and presently Eva burst into the room.

"Haven't you finished your housekeeping at this time of day? I have searched everywhere for you, and only came to the pantry as a last resort. But come along quickly. Uncle John is in a hurry; and moreover, he declares that I shall not hear one word of the letter until you come."

"I am ready," was the reply, and together they started for the library; but Eva's impatience quickly outstripped her sister's deliberate movements, which were in striking contrast to the eagerness with which she generally went to see Uncle John. But Julia had a purpose to accomplish, and she was determined to gain complete control over her feelings before she listened to that letter. She knew that Uncle John's eyes were quick and penetrating, and from him, more than anybody else, she was determined to hide her present feelings and her past action. She well knew that if he should ever suspect the suffering that she had inflicted upon herself, as well as upon Charles, that he would make a strong effort to induce her to alter her decision; and she was not willing to subject herself to the pain of a discussion which could not change her purpose. When she reached the library, Eva was sitting on the sofa beside Uncle John, turning the letter impatiently in her hands, and complaining of slow people in general and her sister in particular.

"You ought not to complain of her this time," he said, laughing. "It is not often that she is too slow. Julia is no sluggard."

"And that is the very reason why it is so provoking, Uncle John. She is generally so brisk and active, that it only makes it the harder to bear, especially when I am so impatient. I should think, too, that she would be anxious herself to hear from Dr. Charles, for she knows how uneasy you have been about him."

Julia felt uncomfortable; and wishing to stop Eva before her thoughtless words should call up the blood to her cheeks, she said:

"Well, I am here now, Eva, and you are delaying the reading of the letter as long, by your complaints of me, as I did by my slow movements. Uncle John, please begin."

It was not what might be exactly a sad letter, for Charles had tried hard not to make it so; but it was not, and could not be a very cheerful one, for the soldier has to look upon more than one battle-field before he can be otherwise than painfully saddened by

the sight. It was, however, interesting to the girls, as well as to Uncle John; and to one of them much more so than he imagined.

"Poor fellow!" he said, as he replaced the letter in the envelope, "he has had a sad, toilsome time, during the last few weeks. I wish that he could indulge in a little recreation, and give me a day or two. It would do us both good."

"Write and ask him to do so, Uncle John," said Eva, "and tell him how glad we would be to see him."

"I will deliver your message, my daughter, when I write. The invitation will not be the less welcome because he cannot accept it. But he cannot come now; he cannot be spared."

"Only for two or three days, Uncle John. That could not possibly make any difference."

"You would not think so, Eva, if Walter were dangerously wounded and under his care. How would it answer for Willie's surgeon to go off and spend several days?"

"Oh, Uncle John, that would never do! His wound requires daily attention, and sometimes the doctor says that he ought to see it oftener, and he is afraid that Willie was taken away from the hospital too soon."

"Well, Eva, bad as Willie's case is, there are many under Dr. Beaufort's care which are perhaps much worse; so that you can yourself see how impossible it would be for him to leave his post even for a single day. Indeed——"

He was interrupted by the sound of a bell rung violently, and Julia, springing up, exclaimed:

"Something is the matter! he has never rung that way before."

She ran out of the room, and in a minute or two reappeared, her face pale with terror, and trembling in every limb.

"Oh, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, "come quick to Willie, or he will bleed to death! Eva, send Tom for the surgeon. Tell him to take the fleetest horse, and to go like lightning!"

She rushed back up stairs, followed by Uncle John, whose presence at that moment was most opportune. The moment that he entered the room, he saw that it might indeed prove a serious matter. Willie's wound was bleeding profusely, and his clothes and bed were already saturated with blood. Uncle John was no surgeon; but in his attendance at the hospital his assistance had several times been required in an emergency; and seeing that there was now no time to be lost, he immediately applied himself to stop the bleeding as best he could, until the arrival of the surgeon.

Julia sank into a chair, deadly pale, sick, and faint with the unaccustomed sight. Uncle John knelt beside the couch, with

both hands busily occupied in his bloody work. Finding that he must have assistance, he said :

"Come here, my daughter. I must have help."

"I cannot, indeed, I cannot, Uncle John," she murmured.

"Julia," he said, sternly, "come here; you must come."

This time she obeyed mechanically; and when she reached the couch, he said :

"Bend down, I have something to say to you."

She bent down, and he whispered :

"The boy's life is in danger; help me to save it!"

"The boy's life is in danger!" The effect was magical. She arose from her stooping position, stood an instant to recover and compose herself; and then, still deadly pale, but perfectly calm, with a steady hand and unshrinking nerve, she assisted Uncle John. Twice the feeling of faintness came over her, but with strong effort she overcame it, and was still busy when the surgeon arrived.

"We have done what we could, sir," said Uncle John; "for we dared not let this thing go on until you could get here. We have not done it skillfully, but we have at least stopped the bleeding."

"It is well for him," he answered, "that you were able to do it at all. From what I see, if the bleeding had gone on at that rate until now, there would be very little use in stopping it. You have done it quite well, too," he added, as he settled himself to finish what was already begun. "You and your young friend will have to take a diploma, and get a situation somewhere in the army hospitals. I should scarcely imagine that she would have nerve enough for such work as this."

Julia stood and watched the surgeon, thinking that what had occurred once might happen again, and that she might some time be obliged alone to try and save Willie's life. When she had seen the last bandage wrapped, and the last pin put in its place, she turned to leave the room. Willie's eyes followed her, and when she reached the door he saw her grasp it as if to keep from falling. He looked at Uncle John, and said, feebly:

"Go with her."

Uncle John hastened to follow her, and he found her tottering along the passage. He just had time to clasp her with his arm as she was falling, and carrying her into her own room, he laid her upon the bed.

"As true and brave a woman as God ever made!" he could not help saying, as she lay pale and still lifeless, while he dashed the water into her face. It was some minutes before consciousness returned, and the first words that she spoke were :

"Don't tell Willie; it might make him unwilling for me to help him, if it should again be necessary."

She raised her head from the pillow, but it fell back again, and she said, faintly :

"More water, Uncle John."

After a little while, she opened her eyes, and said, resolutely :

"This will not do. Help me to stand up, and it will be over in a few minutes. Lead me to the window; I want the fresh air."

He tried to oppose her, but she was determined, and in a few minutes she seemed indeed quite revived.

"Thank you, Uncle John!" she said. "You are an excellent nurse. I only wish that I were so good a one, and not so foolish as to be overcome by the sight of a little blood. However, this is the last time that such a thing will happen. If there were no one else to do it, I would not hesitate to go this minute and bind up that wound just as you did; and I believe that I could do it without moving a muscle."

"I would not like to see you try it alone, just now, Julia, either on your own account or Willie's; but I would not be afraid to trust you to-morrow. And remember, my daughter, what I tell you. His very life depends upon having it stopped immediately. Think of this, if it should be necessary for you to act, and it will nerve you again, as it has done to-day."

"I know it, Uncle John. It was that alone that enabled me to help you just now. When you first spoke to me, I was weak and powerless; but the moment that you said 'save his life,' I felt equal to anything, and I could have worked with you an hour longer, if it had been necessary. It was only when the excitement was over that I gave way; but next time I will be more of a woman, and won't give way at all!"

"Why, what does all this mean?" exclaimed Eva, coming into the room, and seeing something unusual in her sister's appearance, and Uncle John still fanning her. "Are you sick, sister?"

"Not now, Eva; but I was quite sick a few minutes ago."

"She fainted, Eva," said Uncle John, "after helping me to tie up Willie's wound."

"I should have expected nothing else, Uncle John. What made her think of trying to do such a thing?"

"Because, Eva, it was all-important that it should be done at once; I could not do it alone, and nobody else was near to help me. Do you know, my child, that if there had been no one here to-day capable of doing such a thing, the boy would have lost so much blood before the surgeon reached here that he must have died?"

"Oh, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, "surely you are not in earnest!"

"Yes, Eva, I am in earnest. This is a very important matter. An unguarded motion, or undue excitement, might bring this thing on again; and suppose that it should happen in the night, when it might require two or three hours to get the doctor, is there no use in your sister, or yourself even, knowing how and what to do?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, seriously; "but I don't believe that I could do it, even if his life depended upon it."

"So did not your sister say. The moment that I used this argument, she lost sight of everything except the necessity of exertion. She forgot herself altogether as long as she could be useful, and it was only when the strain was removed that she found out how severe it had been."

"Well, well," exclaimed Eva, "sister is at last a heroine! Practical, matter-of-fact as she is, she has made herself a heroine to-day! Now I can write to Dr. Charles, as I promised to do! I would have done so long ago, if I could have found anything in this quiet life of ours to make a letter spicy. But now I have, indeed, rich materials. My heroic sister, with blanched cheek, but unfaltering purpose, dressing a soldier's wound, and saving his life, and then, when it was all over, swooning away in Uncle John's arms! I declare, it would be perfectly splendid, wouldn't it, Uncle John? and then, besides, it would fill up a whole page!"

The merry child laughed heartily, and her sister and Uncle John could not help joining her; and the latter said:

"I declare, Eva, you are absolutely incorrigible!"

"If you were in earnest, Eva," said Julia, "I might have something to say upon the subject; but, as it is, you are quite welcome to your amusement."

"Earnest, sister! You will see presently if I am not in earnest. I positively intend to write to Dr. Beaufort to-day."

"That may be; but you don't intend to mention me, and least of all to mention what has occurred this morning."

"You will see," replied the provoking Eva. "Why, Uncle John, what do you suppose Dr. Beaufort would care for a letter from the Hall that contained nothing about sister? Don't you believe that he would think it 'Hamlet without the character of the Prince of Denmark'?"

"I don't know what he would think of the letter," he replied, laughing, "but I do know that if he could see how you tease your sister, and how patiently she bears it, he would think that you were the most intolerable child, and that she was the meekest woman, in the world."

"She is only amusing herself now, Uncle John," said Julia. "She likes to tease me; but I must do her the justice to say, that she never persists in doing anything when she finds out that I specially disapprove it; and now, although you hear her talking so, she will not say one word about me in her letter."

"You are not in earnest, sister?" said Eva.

"Just as much so, Eva, as you are in your intention to write."

"But why not, sister? Of course I don't intend to make you appear ridiculous, with your 'blanched cheek,' etc., as I threatened to do just now; but, seriously, I don't see any impropriety in mentioning the circumstance. Do you, Uncle John?"

"Yes, if your sister does not wish it."

"You call me provoking, Uncle John, but indeed I think that she is the provoking one now. To condemn anybody to write a letter with nothing in it is unreasonable enough; but to demand the letter, and refuse the materials, is very much like Pharaoh requiring the bricks, but refusing the straw. How upon earth, Uncle John, can I write a letter if I am not to tell anything in it?"

"That is your own look-out, my daughter. Nobody demands the letter of you. You volunteered to write it, and are yourself the best judge whether you are capable of doing it. But, indeed, I must go, girls. I did not intend to stay half an hour when I came, and I have spent the whole morning. I will step into Willie's room and see how he is doing, and then I must hasten home."

He returned immediately, saying that he was asleep, and he charged the girls to keep him perfectly quiet all day.

"I am afraid, Uncle John," said Julia, "that excitement brought this on;" and she told him the circumstance.

"That is it, without a doubt!" said Uncle John. Foolish young boy, to get so excited over a newspaper paragraph! And yet I do not wonder, either; I would have done so too at his age. But, Julia, this must not happen again; and as to you, Miss Eva, I positively prohibit another newspaper in that room until I give permission. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir; and I shall be very careful to obey, since I have seen the consequences of the first one that I have taken in. I can safely promise that the next newspaper he gets will not be from my hands."

"How are Grace and Agnes, Uncle John?" asked Julia, "as she accompanied him to the door. "I have been so occupied with Willie, lately, that I have seen very little of them."

"Agnes is well, Julia; but as to her mother, it is very evident that there is something unusual preying upon her spirits. I can

always tell, my daughter," he said, looking at her kindly and significantly, "when my friends are in trouble, although my penetration may not extend so far as to discover what the trouble is."

Julia colored, but did not reply. She stood in the door and watched him as he rode away, and thought:

"Under other circumstances, there is no one to whom I would so willingly confide my trouble as to you, my dear old Uncle John; but now it cannot be."

She turned away, and went up stairs, and taking a chair in the passage by Willie's door, she sat quietly waiting for him to awake. An open book was in her hand, but her thoughts were far away, and wandered between her own restless, troubled spirit, and a battle-field not far off, with a true, manly heart, whose affection it might have been her privilege to possess.

Uncle John rode along in deep thought, wondering how his usual sagacity could be so much at fault; how he could be so thoroughly convinced that Grace and Julia were both in unusual trouble, and yet so unable to discover what it was.

When he called at the cottage, Grace was on the porch, training the vine-branches around the pillars, and Agnes was playing a wailing, minor strain, which her mother said she called the "Dirge of Manassas." Her thoughts had all flowed in that channel since the battle. Her mother regretted it, and had tried to divert them, and often asked for more cheerful music, but the answer always was:

"I play just as I feel, mother. I am so sorry for the poor wounded soldiers, and for so many widows and orphans that Uncle John says are all over the land."

"Grace," said Uncle John, "this is all wrong, and must be stopped. Agnes must not be allowed to go on in that way. She is but a child, and anything so unnatural as childish depression ought to be checked."

"Not much of a child!" the mother answered, sadly; "I wish that she were! Ah, Uncle John! Agnes gives me much trouble and anxiety, far more than you or any other human being can imagine."

"How so, Grace?" he asked, eagerly, thinking that now at last he had discovered the clew to her great depression lately.

"Because, Uncle John, she is prematurely, unnaturally developed, and I am afraid that, as a consequence, she will prematurely decay."

"Now, Grace, you are altogether mistaken there. Agnes is as much a child as any other that ever lived, and whatever maturity there is about her may be readily accounted for by the peculiarity of her circumstances. She has never had access to

the sports of childhood ; she has never had companions of her own age, but has been all her life accustomed to the conversation of elder people, so that she has adopted their modes of thought as well as their very language. I admit that in conversation Agnes rarely seems a child, but that is our fault. Did you ever hear anybody talk to her as they would to another child of her age ? I am sure that you never do. I have often remarked and deplored it."

"No, sir, for I do not often think of her as a child ; and sometimes, when I suddenly remember how old she is, I am really startled. Perhaps it is her musical genius that makes her seem mature."

"And yet that is a gift utterly separate from and independent of both her mental and physical organization. It is true that the latter may in the end be painfully affected by it, from the fact that she confines herself so closely to the organ ; but she is not necessarily any the less a child in feeling or intellect, because she is a musical one. No, Grace, all these are idle fears, and for Agnes's sake, as well as your own, you ought not to indulge them. She, it is true, cannot, like myself, see the anxious shade upon your face, nor the troubled look in your eye, that I have seen since I came home, more than ever before ; but you yourself know how quick she is to detect the least sadness in your tone, and how readily her feelings are affected by yours. And especially now, when she has caught the contagion of the universal sadness and depression all over the land, ought we to try always to be cheerful when she is with us."

"I will try, Uncle John," the mother answered ; "but, indeed, I cannot help holding the treasure of my little blind child in a trembling grasp. It may be foolish, it may be wrong ; but, Uncle John, no human being knows how afraid I am of losing her !"

"And so you might well be, if there were any cause of apprehension ; but there is none, except that maturity of thought and feeling in the child, which, after all, exists rather in your fancy than in reality. Now, Grace, I am not Mr. Derby, but I think that I can give you a little advice in this matter which he will approve. Enjoy the child while you have her, and thank God for the blessing, and don't poison the pleasure of present possession by the fear of losing her. That is not only your privilege but your Christian duty."

"You are right, Uncle John, I feel and acknowledge it ; and perhaps if my life had been otherwise, I would have been better able to control my foolish fears and anxieties." She paused a moment, and added, resignedly : "But to lose what I valued has

ever been my lot, and it seems almost presumptuous to hope to keep her."

"It is not presumptuous, it is simply what you are bound to do. You ought both to hope for and to expect it, until you find it ordered otherwise."

"Well, Uncle John, if my apprehensions are groundless, they are at least natural, under any circumstances, but especially so in mine. Nobody can conceive how desolate my life would be without that child!"

"Yes, Grace," he said gently, "I can. All my life has been just as lonely, just as desolate, as yours would be without Agnes."

She felt that they were approaching delicate ground, and so, hastening into the parlor, she summoned Agnes to see Uncle John, who greeted her more cheerfully than usual, and avoided all allusion to sad or painful subjects. He said nothing of the scene at the Hall that morning, but talked pleasantly about the girls and Willie, and promised to take her with him the next time that he went. He did not ask her, as usual, to play for him; and when he was going away he said that he intended to write that day to Dr. Charles, and that he would not think the letter complete without a pleasant message from her.

"Tell him, Uncle John, how sorry I am for him, and for all the poor soldiers who have to suffer so much themselves, and to see others suffer too. Tell him, if he could hear me play he might know how sorry I am, but I cannot tell him in words."

"But, Agnes, I did not ask for such a message as that. I asked for a pleasant, cheerful one."

"That is all that I have to send, Uncle John," she answered.

He went away, and in a few minutes the breeze bore to his ears the same sad funereal wail.

"It must be stopped, somehow," he said to himself. "The child must not be so saddened."

As he went along, he was wondering what could be done to draw her thoughts away from such themes, but he did not know what to do; and shaking his head with a dissatisfied air, he said, as he entered his own gate:

"Hard, indeed, that this unnatural war should affect all ages, classes, and conditions! That the life even of a blind child should be made darker and sadder by it!"

CHAPTER XX.

SOME months had now passed away. The wounded at Hopedale had, with few exceptions, recovered and returned to their regiments. The enemy had been too much amazed and demoralized by the unexpected tide of affairs at Bull Run, to make any further demonstrations upon Richmond, while the Confederate army had been too much exhausted by its hard-won victory, to follow the retreating foe to the gates of Washington. By degrees the Federal army had been reorganized, and the two had now stood for some time confronting each other on the Potomac, each waiting for the attack that neither was willing to venture. The Army of the Potomac seemed to be the converging point for the greater portion of the Confederate troops, which, owing to the vast inferiority of numbers, which was their special disadvantage, had to be massed at a few of the most important points, thus leaving many of the fairest portions of the country open to invasion and occupation by the foe. Such was the condition of Hopedale and the surrounding country, whose rich and abundant harvests, now gathered and secured by the inhabitants, offered a tempting bait to the enemy. When it first began to be whispered that this beautiful and fertile valley was to be left outside the Confederate lines, the thought was too unwelcome to be entertained. Some thought that the railroad was too important to the government to be thus abandoned; and others could not believe that miles of country teeming with provisions would be sacrificed; and a few there were, to whose narrow, contracted vision the fate of the nation was as nothing in comparison with their own selfish interests, and who declaimed loudly and bitterly against a policy which did not protect their homesteads and farms. But, in spite of murmurs and complaints, the wheels of government moved on their resistless round; and since all could not be protected, and all could not be saved, it sacrificed the few for the good of the many. Mr. Cameron, Mr. Derby, and Uncle John, like all the rest, had thought and talked much of the matter, but not in the spirit of fault-finding and complaint. They deprecated the result as much as any other men in the community, but they looked at it from a stand-point elevated above their own interests and wishes, and their justice and clear judgment at once grasped the true cause, instead of charging the government with incompetence or negligence.

"It is not the time, gentlemen," said Mr. Derby one day, to a group in the street, who were discussing the lamentable result, which some attributed to one cause and some to another, while all agreed that "somebody was to blame,"—"it is not the time for fault-finding, carping, and distrust. It is not patriotic, it is not manly, while the nation is struggling in the agonies of its birth, to fix our eyes on individual interests and on single measures. Let us for once, if it is possible, forget ourselves, and with might and main uphold, sustain, and strengthen the heaving country; and when its convulsions are over, and our freedom established, then we can use the privilege which belongs to us as freemen; and if we are dissatisfied with our rulers, we can replace them, by the power of the ballot-box, with others more competent or more reliable."

Willie was still at the Hall. His wound, which was pronounced at first very serious, had proved even more so than was expected, and several times his recovery had seemed extremely doubtful. But his youth and strength of constitution, aided by surgical skill and careful nursing, had at last triumphed; and though pale and still very weak from long confinement and loss of blood, he was nevertheless recovering. He was now allowed to walk about the house; but all his movements had still to be gentle and cautious, and his repeated requests to be permitted to go home had been thus far peremptorily refused. Willie was not by any means tired of the Hall. On the contrary, he was now so completely domesticated there, that he fully realized that when he should leave it he would be turning his back upon one home to seek another; but yet he wanted to see the faces of father, mother, and sisters, before he should return to camp, which he hoped from week to week to be able to do. But recovery was very slow, and he was beginning to be restless; for, boy-like, he had felt every day, since he had left his bed, that his present life of inaction was not becoming a soldier. That newspaper paragraph, while all else in the world save himself and the loving hearts at home had forgotten it, still stirred his blood and fired his young ambition; and he wanted to be in the camp and on the field again, where he could make a name for himself. He could not help enjoying his present circumstances, surrounded as he was by all the appliances of wealth and luxury, and he felt that the society of the sisters, especially that of the younger, was becoming daily more agreeable to him; yet, at the same time, he reproached and condemned himself for being so well contented, and greatly feared lest the life of ease and comfort, now rendered necessary by his condition, should unfit him for future hardships and privation.

If Willie had himself learned to feel completely at home at the Hall, he was no less regarded by the family as one of themselves. Mr. Cameron had become greatly interested in the boy. There was in his character an innate gentleness and refinement, allied to a spirit of determination and bravery, which won both his affection and admiration; while the pale face, the languid step, and the fear lest he might be an invalid and a cripple for life, awakened a feeling of sympathy and pity. Julia had become warmly attached to the youth who had been for months the object of her care and solicitude, and who had proved so docile and grateful a patient; while Eva, satisfied with the present, and not troubling herself about the future, had floated calmly along the pleasant tide of her daily life, enjoying his society, until gradually and unconsciously she had found Willie's room pleasanter than the yard or the garden, a quiet conversation with him more agreeable than a ride on Dixie or a romp with Carlo, and reading aloud to him an employment preferable to a fishing excursion or a stroll in the grove. Julia no longer had to complain of torn dresses and tangled curls; Carlo now had nobody to romp with him, and both his mistress and himself had sobered down so completely, that Willie protested to her one day that he believed she had slandered both herself and her dog, for he had never in his life seen a more demure, well-behaved couple.

"I don't know why it is, Willie," she answered, "but it is true, that I have not romped so much of late as I used to do; but you must remember that I am getting to be a young lady now."

"I am glad, Eva," said Julia, "that you are at last beginning to realize that. You know that I have told you so for a long time, but the fact has never as yet made much impression."

"I suppose, sister, that it is either the good or bad effect of example. You and Willie are so quiet and sober, that I am afraid you will make me like yourselves before long. Walter will not know me when he comes back."

"I am quiet and sober perforce, now," said Willie; "but if I could only walk and leap and climb as I could six months ago, you would find me not far behind your brother in noise and frolic. Nobody loves active exercise more than I do, and to sit still now that I am getting well is quite as hard for me as it was to bear the pain. Heigh-ho! I wonder if I will ever again be as strong and active as I once was!"

"Come, Willie," said Julia, "you must not grow desponding or impatient now."

"Desponding! Impatient! Indeed, Miss Julia, I think that I have been a model of hope and patience."

"That is the very reason why I would not have you fail just at the last. Be patient and prudent and obedient still, and you will come out all right in the end. Let me see how obedient you will be now, when I tell you that you have been sitting up long enough, and must lie down on the sofa for an hour and a half."

"I am very tired of the bed and sofa; they are altogether too luxurious for the soldier."

"Come, Willie," said Eva, "we are to have no objections. See how comfortably I have arranged your pillows. It is not every soldier that has a young lady to do that for him!"

"That is true," he answered; "nor would any other soldier be ungrateful enough to complain of any requirement from such nurses as I have. But see, now," he added, going to the sofa, "I will obey without a murmur, and will promise to lie here for an hour and a half—for two hours, if your sister wills it."

"That is a good, obedient patient!" said Eva. "And now is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Yes," he answered, "if you have the time and inclination."

"Of the first," she replied, laughing, "there is never any want, I always have plenty of that; but of the last, I am not quite so sure. Let me hear, however, what it is you want."

"I want you to read to me, talk to me, or otherwise entertain me while I am condemned to lie here."

"Oh! if that is all, my inclination will allow me to gratify you. What must I——. But see! there is papa coming in at the gate. I will run and ask him if there is any war news, and will be back in one minute, Willie."

She met her father half way down the lawn; and when Julia reached the hall door, she saw them talking very earnestly together, as Mr. Cameron rode along in a walk, with Eva by his side. As they approached, Julia saw that there was something very serious the matter; and as soon as she was near enough, Eva called out, in a voice half terrified and half tearful:

"Oh, sister! we are left out of the Confederate lines, and exposed at any moment to a raid or occupation by the enemy. Indeed, some say that the Yankees are coming now!"

Julia was for a moment startled. She had heard the possibility of such a thing discussed by her father and Uncle John, but she did not expect it so soon. She looked at her father in silence, awaiting his confirmation of what Eva had said.

"Yes, my daughter," he said, "it is even so. Hopedale is not so important a point as many others; and as it is impossible to guard them all, we had to be left at the mercy of the enemy."

As usual, her thoughts were speedily collected, and her first words were:

"And Willie, papa; he is not safe here now, is he?"

"Oh!" interrupted Eva, "what on earth would they do to him? A poor wounded boy, that could not ride a mile on horseback if his life depended on it!"

"Nevertheless," said Julia, "he is a Confederate soldier, Eva; and whether wounded or not, is liable to be taken prisoner."

"They would not have the heart to do so cruel a thing, papa, would they?"

"They would certainly take him prisoner, Eva; but in his condition would probably parole him."

"And what is that, papa?"

"It is to make him promise upon his honor never to fight again in the Confederate army until he has been exchanged. If he will do that, they will, perhaps, in consideration of his wound, spare him from the confinement of prison."

"He might be willing to promise not to fight for two or three months, papa; for he will not be able to do it before that time."

"But this would not suffice," said her father, smiling. "He must promise unconditionally, and must keep it, too. It is considered very disgraceful for a soldier to violate his parole. I don't believe that Willie would consent to be captured on these conditions, even if he is obliged to run some risk to get away."

"I believe, papa," answered Eva, "that I would stay. I cannot think that the Yankees will even take him prisoner under the circumstances. I don't believe that they would be so inhuman as to molest him in any way, when they see how weak and sick he is."

"Trust not to Yankee humanity, my daughter; for be sure it will fail you, especially in time of war. You will learn, my child, before this war is over, that 'the tender mercies' of warfare, like those of the wicked, are 'cruel.' No, Eva, Willie must go. He ought not, he must not stay here any longer."

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes, "where can he go? who will take care of him? He is not able to travel; the doctor told him only yesterday that it might cost him his life to go home. Don't send him away, papa, please don't! Hide him in the garret. I will take his meals to him myself, and not a human being shall know that he is there."

"Poor child! how little do you know of the usages of war or of human nature! The Federal soldiers would not be half an hour in Hopedale before some one would inform them that there was a Confederate soldier at Cameron Hall, and offer to guide them to the place."

"But, papa, you can lock your doors and refuse to let them in.

It is your house, and nobody has a right to enter it without your permission."

"Permission! Right! These, my daughter, are words that have no place in the vocabulary of war. A squad of armed soldiers would come here and demand admittance; and if refused, bolts and bars would not long exclude them, and neither garret, cellar, nor closet would be a safe retreat from their search. And if Willie should be found thus concealed, they might perhaps deal very harshly with him; and, regardless of his wound and suffering, send him off to a Northern prison. Rather than risk this, would it not be much better to go away at once, while he can do so quietly and leisurely?"

"Yes, sir, perhaps it would. But is it certain that they are coming now?"

"By no means, Eva. There are a thousand rumors, none of which may be true; and yet none are impossible. One thing, however, is unmistakably true, and that is, that we are exposed, and are liable at any hour to a raid. Now, this being the case, and Willie's condition being such that haste and excitement would be highly injurious to him, my advice would be to go away now in peace and quiet. It is what I would do myself, and what I should want Walter to do."

"Then, papa," she said, "if he is obliged to go, the sooner that he is off the better; so I will run and tell him."

"Indeed you will not!" exclaimed her sister, seizing her arm and detaining her by a firm grasp. "Listen to me one moment. Remember, Eva, the terrible scene that we had the morning that Uncle John was here; and as you value Willie's life, do nothing to cause a repetition of it. You must not go near him now, you are entirely too much excited."

"Well, sister," exclaimed the bewildered Eva, "what is to be done? Papa says that he must not stay, and you say that he must not be told to go!"

"No, Eva, not that. I do not say that he must not be told; but only that he must not be told in the way that you propose to do it. Papa is the proper person to tell him, and to advise him, and he will do it calmly."

"Then, papa," said the impatient Eva, "please to go and tell him at once."

"Where shall I find him, Eva, in his room?"

"No, sir, he is in the library."

Mr. Cameron found him lying on the sofa with his eyes closed; and he thought, as he entered the door, that Julia was right in not deeming him a fit subject for any startling intelligence. He sat down by him, and told him quietly but frankly what he had heard.

"What do you think of the probable truth of these rumors, Mr. Cameron?"

"Indeed, Willie, having no facts on which to base an opinion, I can scarcely be said to have one at all. These rumors are not improbable in themselves; and yet I am not disposed to credit them, because I know that nothing is easier than to create a panic, and that then the wildest and most unfounded stories are circulated and believed."

"What would you advise me to do, sir?"

"Under the circumstances, I would advise you to go away immediately. If you were stronger, and able to get away in a hurry, you might wait until the approach of the enemy was certain; but in your condition, when so much depends upon prudence and caution, I think it would be better for you to go at your leisure. I am sorry to give you up, Willie, especially sorry to send you away from the Hall, weak and suffering; but I advise you now as I would Walter."

"Thank you, sir!" he answered. "I am very sorry, Mr. Cameron, to leave your hospitable home, where I have received so much kindness. I cannot repay it, sir; but neither can I forget it. I owe my life," he added, with moistened eyes, "to Cameron Hall; may I so use it in this war that you and your daughters may not regret having saved it!"

"You must not feel under obligations to us, my son," answered Mr. Cameron. "We have only done our duty; and it was a much easier and lighter one than you were called upon to perform at Manassas for us and the rest of your countrymen."

"When must I go, Mr. Cameron?"

"As soon as possible. To-morrow morning, if you can."

"Do you think that I might venture to go home?"

"I should think not, Willie; but you must ask the surgeon about that. If you would like to see him, I will send for him at once."

"If you please, sir," he answered.

Mr. Cameron went out to send the messenger, and as he left the room, Willie said:

"Will you ask Eva, sir, if she has forgotten her promise? Tell her that I have kept mine about lying quietly on the sofa, but she seems to have forgotten hers."

Eva came, sober and thoughtful enough now. Willie's going away had seemed something so far in the future that she had never thought about it at all; and his society, and the attention that he required, had in the course of months become so much a part of her daily life and thought, that she could not bear to think of the painful void that his departure would create. It had come

upon her, too, most suddenly and unexpectedly, and, altogether unaccustomed to control or hide her feelings, her sorrow now was very evident. Nor did she at all object to his seeing her distress. She had never thought of looking into her heart, and did not suspect that her feelings toward Willie were not altogether what they were toward Walter. She had never been called upon to nurse Walter in sickness or suffering; and if she felt a tenderness and sympathy for her guest that she had never felt for her brother, she thought, if she took time to think about it at all, that it was the natural result of his condition and circumstances. Impulsive and childlike in her grief, as she was in her mirth, she had already indulged in a hearty cry while her father had been talking to Willie, and her eyes were red and her cheeks stained with tears, when she slowly obeyed Willie's summons to the library. Nor was he much stronger proof against the pain of separation. Like Eva, he, too, had never thought of examining his feelings with regard to her. He only knew that he was not only contented, but happy, when she was sitting by, talking to him, reading to him, or arranging his flower-vases. The sight of her, the thought of her had become with him a daily necessity; and while he was aware of this, still it had never occurred to him that his feeling for her differed in kind and degree from that affectionate gratitude that he felt toward her father and sister. He differed, however, from Eva in one respect. The sudden and unexpected necessity of separation, while it distressed her, did not enlighten her with regard to her feelings; but as to Willie, the truth flashed upon him in a moment, and he knew at once that the keen pang occasioned by the thought of leaving Eva, was something altogether different from the deep but more sober regret with which he would bid farewell to the other members of the family. Mr. Cameron had scarcely left the room before Willie regretted that he had sent for Eva. He would rather have had time to reflect a little while, and to decide if, at this time and under these circumstances, it would be right to say all that he wanted to tell her. And now, when she came in looking so troubled, so different from the bright laughing child that he had always seen her before, he felt that it would be impossible to resist the temptation of laying his whole heart open to her. But he found no time to do it. Her imagined self-control all gave way the very moment that she looked at him; and seating herself beside his sofa, she buried her face in her hands and cried like a very child. Willie looked at her sorrowfully, but dared not trust himself to speak, and after a few minutes she wiped away the tears, and, brushing back her hair, apologized to him, not for the distress or the tears, these seemed to her natural enough, but for having indulged them at that particular time.

"I must go now, Willie," she said, rising from her seat, "for I find that I cannot talk to you now. I thought I could when I came in. Sister would be worried if she were to see this, for she says that you must be quiet. I will come back after awhile."

Willie held her hand for an instant, and looked at her, but did not speak, and then she left the room.

An hour afterwards, as Julia passed Eva's door, she heard a sob, and looking into the room, saw her sister sitting upon the floor in the perfect abandonment of grief. Julia stood and looked at her with sympathy and pity, and it may be almost with a feeling of envy, too, as she thought:

"Fortunate child, who can thus relieve your burdened heart! Unconscious that there is aught in your feelings which it were better to conceal, you pour out your grief without restraint; while I must add to the burden of an aching heart the perpetual struggle of concealment! You are greatly distressed, none can doubt it, but, oh! how much less so than I am!"

She went up to Eva and laid her hand upon her head. Eva looked up, and her tears burst out afresh. Julia waited until there was another lull in the storm, and then said, gently:

"This will not do, Eva. You are not a child now, and another than your sister might perhaps consider this grief unmaidenly. I can understand it; I can make allowance for your temperament, which others might not do."

"There is nothing to make allowance for," she answered between her sobs. "Willie is going away, wounded and sick. He cannot get home, and he will be thrown among strangers, with nobody to take care of him. I am distressed, I acknowledge it, and am not ashamed of it, and I would not care if the whole world knew it."

"Yes, Eva, you and I may know that your feelings are natural, but others might not know it, and might misconstrue them."

"Nobody misconstrued my grief when Walter went away, and I am sure that I did not try to hide it."

"Willie is not Walter, Eva. One is your brother, the other was a stranger to you not many months since."

"He is not a stranger now. I love him dearly now, almost, if not quite as well as I do Walter."

"That may be, child," said Julia, with a sad, quiet smile. "It may be that you love him better than your brother; it must be that you love him differently."

"No I don't!" exclaimed Eva, as with flashing eyes she sprang up from the floor. "Is that what you mean, sister, by my sorrow being misinterpreted? If I thought that—if I thought that any one could suspect me of being in love with Willie, could

imagine that I would bestow my affections unasked, my very eyeballs should be scorched by the hot tears that I would force back, for I would not shed one to relieve my heart if it were breaking! No, indeed! I can give him unasked a sister's love, but nothing else!" She paused an instant, and then said, looking mortified and distressed: "You, sister, are the last person in the world that I would have suspected of so misjudging me."

"I have not done it, my darling!" answered Julia, earnestly. "I know and understand you thoroughly; and it is because I know that you would shrink like a sensitive plant from such a suspicion, that I now caution you against the indulgence of feelings which might and probably would be misconstrued. You are very young, Eva, younger even in heart than you are in years, and you do not know how the world would interpret your present sorrows. You have been all your life sheltered in the ark of home, where, without fear of misconstruction, you could speak and act freely; but when you go out into the world you will not always meet with father, sister, brother, to make allowance and to understand you; there you will always have to guard against misunderstanding and misconception."

"Sister," said Eva, looking earnestly at her, "do you suppose that Willie could possibly thus misconceive me? He saw that I was distressed, for I never thought of trying to hide it. If I thought that he could, I would very speedily undeceive him."

She looked as if she were about to rush at once to the library to make good her words, but her sister's grasp restrained her, as she answered:

"I do not believe that he will, Eva. I think that Willie understands your character and disposition very thoroughly. He knows that yours is an ardent, impulsive temperament, without either restraint or concealment; and then another thing, Eva, the very thing which, with the world, might have laid you open to misconstruction, will be perhaps with him your safeguard from it. He will naturally conclude that if there were in your feeling for him anything of a tenderer, deeper nature than there is for your brother, you would surely not have so frankly confessed it."

"Well, if he does not know it now, I will see to it that he finds it out before he leaves the Hall."

"Take care, Eva, lest in your fear of being misjudged you should overleap the mark. Treat him naturally and kindly, just as you have always done; otherwise he might believe that your grief was at the time beyond your control; but inasmuch as it was the result of a feeling that you were desirous to conceal, you had, by great effort, succeeded in mastering it. Be your own natural self, and I am satisfied that Willie will understand you as I

do. We must try and be cheerful to-day, and make his last recollections of the Hall as pleasant as possible. Poor Willie! I am sorry that he is obliged to go away sick and feeble. I did hope that when he left us, it would be to rejoin his regiment, the same strong, robust soldier that he was when he entered it. Come, now, dry your tears, brush your hair, and go and talk to him cheerfully and pleasantly, as you are accustomed to do."

The surgeon came, and, as he was going away, Mr. Cameron asked him what Willie was to do.

"He must leave, of course, sir. I have received orders to remove all the wounded immediately, for this place is no longer safe for our soldiers."

"Have you given him permission to go home?"

"Home! Why, sir, he lives in Alabama, and such a journey would surely kill him. No, sir! I have ordered him to stop after one day's ride upon the cars. He must not even go as far as Richmond, but must stop so soon as he is within Confederate lines. If he is prudent and careful, he will be able in a few weeks to go home, but he must not think of attempting it now."

"Your commands must be very positive, doctor, or he will not obey you. His heart is fixed upon going home."

"I see that it is, sir, and he may possibly disobey me; but I have stated the case very plainly, and have told him that if he goes home now, he will do it at the risk of his life. I feel sorry for the young fellow. He hates to go away from here, and he wants to go home, and it will evidently be a great struggle to stop between the two places. You must persuade him, Mr. Cameron, to follow my advice; it would be a pity for him to lose his life at last through impatience and self-will,"

The last dinner at the Hall was not pleasant to any of the party. Eva could not talk; Julia tried to do so, but failed; and Mr. Cameron and Willie kept up the scattering remarks that were meant for conversation. It was an effort on Willie's part, and he was glad when it was over. The only thing that Eva listened to at all was her father's question and Willie's reply.

"Of course you will not try to go home, after what the doctor has told you?"

"I do not know, sir. That depends upon my condition and strength after the first day's travel. It seems to me that I must be a better judge than any one else can be, how much fatigue and jolting I can bear."

"Indeed, my son, you are not. The doctor says that it is possible that you may be able to go in a few weeks, but not before."

"A few weeks, Mr. Cameron! Why by that time I expect to

be with the army of the Potomac. You have no idea how rapidly I am getting well now, thanks to the care of the Hall."

"I trust that you may soon be able to rejoin your regiment, Willie; but you certainly will not be, if you take the case into your own hands. I should be sorry for you to go away from the Hall now, only to throw away all the advantages that you confess yourself to have gained here."

"I shall be very careful not to do that, sir; for I assure you that I am tired enough of being on the invalid list, and anxious enough to get into service again."

The sisters seemed now to have exchanged places. Eva was quiet and sad, while Julia tried to take her place and cheer and entertain Willie.

"Come, my patient," she said, as they left the table, "you must surrender yourself prisoner to me this afternoon, and obey orders for the last time. I am afraid, Willie, that the pain of leaving the Hall will be quite counterbalanced by the relief of escape from my persecuting and endless restrictions and watching."

"Very pleasant restrictions and watching they have been, Miss Julia, and I doubt not as beneficial as they were pleasant. If all captivity were as agreeable as that of Cameron Hall, there would be no great objection to being taken prisoner. Heigh-ho! To-morrow I shall have the old, lonely, hospital feeling again, and would be glad enough for the privilege of obeying one of Miss Julia's commands!"

"Since you deem it a privilege, Willie, I shall feel less reluctance in enforcing my present orders. I condemn you now to the sofa, not for an hour and a half, as usual, but for the whole afternoon. You will need all your strength to-morrow. Eva shall entertain you, as she promised to do this morning, and I will pack your valise."

"I obey instantly, and without a murmur," he replied, as he walked slowly toward the library.

Julia caught Eva's arm, and whispered:

"Rouse up, Eva, and be yourself again! It is unnatural to see you so quiet."

"I will try, sister," she answered; "but I do not feel cheerful and happy, and it is unnatural for me to seem otherwise than I feel. Walter had been gone many weary days before I was myself again."

The effort at conversation was wholly unsuccessful. Either Willie did not want to talk at all, or else the subjects which Eva chose did not accord with his feelings. She thought that perhaps he was tired, and would like for her to read to him until he

fell asleep, as she frequently did, and so she proposed to get a book.

"Not now, Eva; I would rather talk to you, if you will listen to me. I like human friends better than books. We are friends, are we not, Eva?"

"Yes, Willie, friends, warm friends, and I trust will always be so."

"But what if that does not satisfy me, Eva? What if I should ask you to be something more than a friend?"

"It would not require much effort, Willie, to grant even that request. Already you seem much more like brother than friend. Sometimes I feel as if I really had Walter back again."

"Oh no, Eva!" he exclaimed, hastily; then checking himself, he closed his eyes and compressed his lips tightly for a minute. Then he said:

"If you will allow me the invalid's privilege of being whimsical, Eva, I believe that I would like for you to read to me now."

"Certainly; but what has changed your mind so soon, Willie? It is something new for you to be whimsical."

"Perhaps it is; but you will bear with it this time: it is the last!" he said, sadly.

She felt the words, but with an effort worthy of her sister, she controlled herself, and said:

"What shall I read?"

"The same old thing, Eva, the fourth canto of Childe Harold. I would like to hear you read it once more before I go."

She took Byron from the bookcase, and read as he requested. He did not interrupt her, as he usually did, to comment upon his favorite passages, but was perfectly quiet until she had finished. Then she asked:

"Shall I read another canto, Willie?"

"No, thank you; that is enough."

His eyes were closed, and there was an expression upon his face that she could not exactly interpret. She could not tell whether it was sadness, or weariness, or pain; but thinking that he wanted to be quiet, and hoping that he might fall asleep, she sat very still, glad to have nothing to do but to think.

She was sitting upon a low chair beside the sofa, a little in front of him, so that she could not see him without turning her head. She leaned her face on her hand, and thought of this, the last evening; another day and he would be far away, and she would sadly miss the employment that had now become almost a necessity of her life. Willie was very quiet, and she thought that he was sleeping; but he was watching her face, and reading there

the pain that was in her heart, and which no effort could successfully disguise. An hour before, his own heart would have bounded to have seen that expression, for he would have put upon it the interpretation that he so ardently desired; but now, he saw in it only a sister's regret for a brother's departure, and he was now painfully conscious that it was no sister's love from Eva that would satisfy him.

"Perhaps," he thought, "she looks upon me as nothing more than a boy. I am scarcely more, it is true; but I am older than she is. Perhaps it is because I have done nothing yet to distinguish myself; but it is not too late. I may yet do something to make me worthy of her, and I know that I would, if she would only tell me that then she would welcome me to her heart as something more than brother. Brother! how much pain that word has given me! I would give worlds if she would only recall it! I may be satisfied to be a brother to her sister; to herself I must be something nearer than that, or nothing. Perhaps she will recall it, or modify it; I will see."

He took the hand on which her face was resting, and said:

"You look troubled, Eva. I would be glad to think that my departure has something to do with it. I wish that I could believe that it gives you as much pain as it costs me."

"If it will afford you any pleasure, Willie, to know that I am sorry to give you up, you are welcome to it. I shall miss you sorely, for," she added, with a faint smile, "I will no longer have a wayward invalid to watch over, to find fault with, to bring flowers to, and to entertain."

"Nor will you have to keep quiet any longer, Eva. There will be no sick soldier, whose sleep you can disturb, so that you and Carlo may have the freedom of the house, and the privilege of making as much noise as you please."

"A privilege of which we shall probably not avail ourselves. We have been quiet so long now that it is no restraint. I have not cared to romp lately. Perhaps sister's wishes are at last about to be realized, and I am actually becoming a woman in feeling as well as in years. Besides, Willie, I shall not feel like a frolic for a long time after you are gone. How long before we shall see you at the Hall again?"

"Ah, Eva! I cannot tell. That depends upon two things: my duty in the army, and whether I would be welcome here again."

Eva looked at him for a moment in surprise, and then, bursting into a laugh that had in it some of the usual merriment, said:

"Welcome, indeed, you foolish boy! As if you did not know that you would be always welcome at the Hall! Were you not

welcome as a stranger? Do you expect to be less so as a friend?"

"Perhaps I have not said exactly what I meant. It is not that I am doubtful of a welcome; but I may be of the kind of one that I must have."

"Well, exacting sir, you shall have one that will satisfy even you. You shall not be received as stranger or even friend. You shall have just such a warm, affectionate welcome as Walter himself shall have when he returns. Will that suffice?"

The old expression returned, whether pain or weariness, she could not tell; again he closed his eyes for a minute, and then replied, sadly:

"Perhaps so; at any rate, I suppose it must."

They were silent a little while, and then Eva asked:

"Willie, are you obliged to go?"

"'Obliged to go,' Eva! I do not understand you."

"I mean, would it not be possible to stay?"

"Yes, it would be possible, if I were willing to run the risk of being made prisoner."

"But papa said this morning that in your condition they would not send you away to prison. They would parole you, and then you could stay with us, and they would not trouble you."

"But, Eva, do you know what is meant by a paroled prisoner?"

"Yes; papa said that you could not fight any more until you were exchanged."

"Eva," said Willie, looking fixedly at her, "would you have me to do this? Would you have me, for fear of pain or trouble or inconvenience, surrender myself a prisoner to the Federals, promising not to fight again until I was exchanged, even if that might be for two or three years, or during the war? What would you think of me, Eva, if I were to do this?"

"I would not have you do it for anything in the world, Willie, if you were well; but when you risk your life in avoiding it, that is another thing."

"I do not risk my life, Eva. I can go as far as the doctor orders with perfect safety. I will suffer some pain, and a good deal of fatigue from the journey, but that is all; and you know that if, for fear of this, I could stay here quietly and submit to being made prisoner, you would be the very first one to feel for me the hearty contempt that I would deserve. No, Eva, I will have to be literally at death's door, and utterly unable to get away, before I am ever taken prisoner without an effort to escape."

There was another silence, which Eva presently broke, by asking, suddenly:

"Willie, will you do something for me?"

"Anything that mortal man can do; at least that mortal man in my present helpless condition can do, I will do for you."

"It will not require exertion; it is only a promise."

"Well, anything to gratify you; what is it?"

"Promise me that you will not try to go home until the doctor tells you that it would be safe to do it."

"A hard request, Eva. I will promise not to go until I am quite able to bear the journey."

"That will not do; I do not care to exact any promise at all unless it is one that will entirely satisfy me. How long before he thought you could go?"

"Six weeks; but anybody can see how preposterous that is. If I am not well in six weeks and ready to join my regiment, I shall despair of ever being able to go into service again. If I am to wait any longer than that, I might as well resign at once, for the fighting will be over and peace declared before I am able to do any more of it. I will promise, Eva, not to do anything imprudent, for I am sure that nobody can be half as anxious for me to get well as I am myself."

"Anxious you may be, Willie; but you are nevertheless imprudent, as I can testify. If you had not had such tyrannical nurses, you would not have been to day as well as you are."

"If I had not had such nurses (leaving out the disagreeable adjective), I am very sure that I never should have been well at all; but, thanks to their tuition, I know how to take care of myself now, and I promise you that I intend to do it."

"All this will not do, Willie. I must return to my original proposition. Will you or will you not gratify me by making this promise?"

He hesitated a moment, and then asked: "Did you say that it would gratify you, Eva?"

"Yes, very much."

"Do you understand what a sacrifice it involves? Do you remember that you are condemning me, in my present weak state, to the discomfort and loneliness of a strange place, and the society of strangers?"

"Have you before found much discomfort or loneliness in the society of strangers?"

"No, Eva; but I do not expect to find Cameron Halls all over the Confederacy."

"Nevertheless, Willie, you will acknowledge that you do not believe that all the kindness, sympathy, and good feeling of the Confederacy are pent up within the four walls of this old Vir-

ginia country-house, where you happened to find a home in your suffering. On the contrary, you must rather think that if you found enough of it here to make you comfortable, how much there must be scattered throughout the Confederacy in its thousands of homes! I am not condemning you to loneliness and privation; I am only sending you away to find out that there is more kindness in the world besides what you have found here. You have never given me a direct answer to my question, yet; will you promise, or not?"

"You are exacting, Eva."

"Call me exacting, pertinacious, unreasonable, anything, if you will only promise that you will not, for six weeks, go farther from here than one day's travel on the railroad. Will you?"

"I will, on one condition; and that is, if you will give me permission to return here in three weeks if the country is free. If you will give me this to look forward to, perhaps I can endure it that long."

"That condition is very easily granted, since it will afford us as much pleasure as it will give you. Yes, in three weeks, if it is safe for you to come, you shall return to the Hall."

"Cannot I come before?"

"No, I positively forbid it; and not even then, unless you are stronger and otherwise better than you are now. You see, Willie, that you cannot escape your exacting nurses even by going away; their directions and orders for the future must still go along with you."

"And I have no objection to carrying them along, and obeying them, too, provided that they are reasonable; but you must take care to make them so if you expect obedience. Now what do you say to writing? Am I to be allowed or denied that privilege?"

"You are not only allowed it, but it is positively enjoined upon you; and if you do not avail yourself of it, the nurses at the Hall will be both disappointed and provoked."

"How often may I write?"

"Just as often as you feel disposed and are able to do so."

"Thank you for that gracious permission, Eva! I began to think that I was not only to be driven into exile, but also fettered down by inexorable decrees to everything that was disagreeable, and denied everything that was pleasant."

"By no means, Willie. I want you to have every enjoyment consistent with your health."

"One thing more: how often may I hear from the Hall?"

"Just as often as you wish it."

"Thank you very much for that promise. I ask a daily letter from you."

"Good gracious, Willie!" she exclaimed. "I really thought that I was talking to a reasonable being, when I made the promise. Surely you forget that I have Walter to write to, and he is unreasonable about wanting frequent letters; but even he has never yet made such an unheard-of demand as that."

"Nevertheless, your promise was positive and unconditional, and its fulfillment requires a daily letter. Will it be such a sacrifice, Eva?"

"It would certainly be on your part," she answered, laughing. "A daily letter from me would kill anybody in the world."

"I am willing to risk it. Will you promise?"

"Indeed, Willie, as I always like to keep a promise, I must think a little while before I answer you."

"Would it be such an effort, Eva, to write to me? Would you feel it so to write to that brother to whom you so constantly compare me?"

"No, indeed! When I write to Walter, I am under no more restraint than if I were talking to him. I don't care either how the letter looks or what is in it, and should not be at all distressed if Carlo were to jump into my lap, and, dipping his foot into the inkstand, add a postscript to my letter. But with you the case would be different."

"It must not be, Eva. You have seen best in other respects to place me on an equality with Walter, and if there are any benefits resulting from the position, it is but fair that I should enjoy them. Grant me this one favor; write me just such free, unrestrained, home-like letters as you send your brother. Will you?" he asked earnestly.

"Indeed, Willie," she answered, "you know not what you ask. What would you care for a letter full of Carlo and Dixie and Rebel, with whom you are not acquainted; and the grove and the brook and the old walnut-tree, where you have never been? These are the themes with which I entertain Walter."

"Is there nothing else in your letters?"

"Yes, a little. I tell him about papa, sister, and myself; what we do every day, how I think and feel, how much I miss him, and long for his return; in short, I tell him everything."

"Will you promise me just such letters as these without the out-door details? Will you give me a faithful picture of the home-scene, the inner life of the Hall? You see that I can be pertinacious as well as yourself. You have set me the example, and in this case will find me not unwilling to follow it. I yielded

to your demand, and promised to submit to the weariness and loneliness of a six weeks' sojourn among strangers; let me see if you are generous enough to do what you can to relieve the tedium to which you yourself have condemned me. Say, Eva, will you promise?"

"Poor Willie!" she answered, smiling, "you little dream that the letters for which you are so earnestly pleading will only serve to increase the monotony, instead of relieving it. But be it as you wish; you shall have a daily letter. It may be that if it serves no other purpose, it may, as sister would say, teach you the useful lesson that in this world we sometimes get what we have most desired only to be bitterly disappointed."

"Very well," he answered, joyfully. "If such should be my lesson now, I promise to accept it without a murmur."

"You don't intend to restrict me to home details, do you, Willie?"

"I restrict you to nothing, Eva. Home details will be most interesting to me, but I should be very ungrateful if I were indifferent to others. Uncle John and Agnes will always interest me, and Agnes's mother, too, whose low voice, and gentle touch, and soothing manner, I can never forget during those days and nights of suffering that she and your sister nursed me. It is wonderful what firmness and fortitude can be shown by such delicately organized women as they are."

"It is no less wonderful to me, Willie. It is well for you that you were not left to my care. I can nurse and wait on the sick untiringly; but if your life had depended on it, I could not have helped Uncle John tie up those arteries as sister did."

"It was a great effort for her," said Willie. "I saw that plainly enough, and was as much relieved on her account as on my own, when I saw the surgeon."

"Have you slept any this afternoon?" inquired Julia, coming into the room.

"Slept! No, indeed, not the last day that I am to stay at the Hall! I shall have time enough for that during the next six weeks; and expect to do enough of it, too. The forgetfulness of sleep will be my chief comfort."

"Come, Willie," said Julia, "you must not go away to be sad and desponding. I regret as much as you can do that you are obliged to go before you are entirely recovered; but you must be cheerful. You will get well much faster if you are."

"Yes," said Eva, "cheerful and prudent! Don't forget the last, sister. I have spent the greater part of the evening, trying to convince him that it is prudent and necessary that he should obey the doctor, and not try to go home for six weeks. He has finally

yielded, and it will only require a very few words from you to make my lecture entirely effectual."

"Eva preaching prudence!" exclaimed Julia, raising both her hands. "That would indeed be a sermon worth hearing! She could illustrate her subject so forcibly from her own experience and practice!"

"I don't know about that," Willie answered, laughing. "I have heard that sometimes theory and practice don't go together; but I must say that my fair young preacher seemed to understand her subject well enough theoretically. She urged prudence in a very downright practical way, and told me in plain terms what I ought to do."

"Which, sister says, Willie, is the best preaching in the world. And if its character is to be judged by its results, my sermon must have been good; for it was effectual, and has already changed the purposes of my listener, as you yourself can testify."

"That is a privilege enjoyed by very few older and more experienced preachers than you are, Eva," said a voice at the door. "Such visible and speedy results from a single sermon do not often gladden the minister's heart."

"Where on earth did you come from, Mr. Derby?" exclaimed Eva, laughing.

"I hope that you will forgive the eaves-dropping, Eva. To listen to you discussing the merits of a sermon of your own might well prove an irresistible temptation to a stronger will than mine."

"Never mind, Mr. Derby, you may laugh as much as you please; but I still insist upon it that, arguing the worth of my sermon from its practical results, nobody could have done it better, although I say it!"

"Hurrah, Eva," said Mr. Derby. "You not only magnify your office, but yourself along with it. Come, now, let me hear the subject of this wonderfully successful sermon."

"Prudence!" replied Eva, demurely, and trying hard to keep back the smile that lingered around the corners of her mouth.

Mr. Derby threw himself back in his chair, and laughed heartily.

"Prudence!" he repeated. "Well, my child, I cannot imagine why you chose that subject, unless it was because you had very close at hand a lamentable illustration of the want of it. Sometimes the necessity of a virtue can be most strongly enforced by the result of its absence! But tell me how you went to work. Perhaps I can gain from you a few practical hints in the way of making sermons effective; it would certainly be a secret worth knowing. Your subject was Prudence. Next in order come the divisions; what were the heads?"

"Divisions! Heads! I didn't need anything of that sort; and besides, my subject was not susceptible of division. I would like to know, Mr. Derby, how you could divide Prudence!"

"Perhaps that is the reason, Eva, that none of it fell to your share," he answered, laughing. "However, your headless sermon is after all not altogether an anomaly; for I have listened to many in my life that were quite as innocent of all the rules that we learned at the seminary. Let us see now if it had the third requisite. Thus far, your skeleton reads: Subject, Prudence; Heads, none. Now, thirdly, for the logic. By what arguments did you enforce your subjects?"

"Arguments! What on earth, Mr. Derby, would I want with an argument to prove that people ought to be prudent! No, indeed! I didn't want any arguments."

"Well, Eva, what did you have, and what did you do?"

"I just told him his duty so plainly and clearly that he could not help seeing it; and I pinned him down to the subject until he had promised to do it."

"Well," said Mr. Derby, "we have at last reached some of the true elements of sermonizing. Plainness and directness are indispensable, and sometimes effectual; but not always so. I have known them to fail. It may be, Eva, that the secret of the practical power of your sermon may, after all, be found in the temper and disposition of the listener. Much frequently depends upon that. How was it, Willie? Were you disposed to listen and to receive the truth?"

"In that respect, sir, she had very serious obstacles to overcome. Her listener was not at all inclined to receive her instructions, and resisted for a long time."

"Still there is something unexplained," said Mr. Derby. "She used no arguments to convince the reason and judgment. She only made duty clear to an unwilling heart. Now there must have been something to overcome that unwillingness and make it yield. What was it, Willie?"

"She promised a reward, sir."

"Aha! that is the secret! Well, the hope of reward is a legitimate argument for the preacher; and so her sermon had, after all, some of the proper elements; though I thought, in the beginning, that she was about to strike out an entirely new method."

"Mr. Derby," said Eva, laughing, "I am entirely at your service, sir. Any time that you are indisposed to write, or that your ingenuity fails, just send to me and I will prepare for you a sermon, so unconscious of divisions and logic, that it will amaze if it does not edify your congregation."

"Thank you, for your kind offer, Eva. I will not forget it, and

hope that when I apply to you for assistance, you will be careful to choose a subject upon which my life and character afford as remarkable a commentary as yours do upon the subject of your present discourse."

"I will attend to that, sir. But there may still be another reason why this one was preached with greater power and effect. It was a farewell sermon. Perhaps you are not aware that Willie leaves us in the morning."

"Yes, it is that which has brought me to the Hall this evening. I only heard a little while ago that he would leave us tomorrow. I am sorry, Willie, that you must go while you are so much of an invalid."

"It is certainly much to be regretted on my part, sir, for I shall sadly miss the care and attention to which I have been so long accustomed here. I hope, some of these days, Mr. Derby, to prove that I was not wholly unworthy of it."

"You must not wait so long as that, Willie," said Eva. "The surest way of proving yourself worthy of our care is to be prudent, and get well just as fast as you can. Then we will know that our time and attention were not wasted, and (which is by no means an unimportant consideration) that our sermons upon Prudence, etc. were not thrown away. But who are those with papa in the buggy? Grace and Agnes, I do believe, and Uncle John coming behind on horseback! Why, Willie, I declare you are quite a belle!"

"Perhaps, Eva, I would not be quite so much so elsewhere. Cameron Hall does not need a wounded boy to make it an attractive place, as Uncle John himself would cheerfully testify."

"Nevertheless, you are certainly the attraction this evening. Agnes will be greatly distressed at your going away; and the organ will groan with the saddest of wails for days to come. I am sorry that you have to go before you have ever heard her play."

"It will give me one more pleasure, Eva," he answered, "to look forward to when I return to the Hall."

The party now came in, and the evening would have passed off pleasantly enough, but for a single regret that overshadowed them all. Eva was rather gratified than otherwise, that there should have been a large circle at the Hall on this, Willie's last evening. She did not enjoy it, but it occupied her and kept her from thinking. When Julia was in trouble, she liked to be alone, until she had brought both thoughts and feelings under control; while Eva, on the contrary, liked an excitement that would drown her thoughts altogether. So this evening, while there was nothing exciting in the familiar circle gathered in the library, still there

was employment enough to keep her thoughts from being painfully fixed upon the morrow; and the general conversation, in which she tried to take part, was a relief to her.

When the last good-by had been spoken, and they were all gone, Willie said:

"Eva, when you write to me, I want you never to forget Mr. Derby. He has been very kind to me ever since I have been here; and has just now given me a few parting words of advice that I trust I will treasure up and act upon. I am glad to know Mr. Derby. The life of such a man is a powerful witness to the truth of religion."

The next morning everything was ready for departure. The carriage was at the door for Willie, and the buggy for Julia and her father. Mr. Cameron was at the carriage, arranging the cushions and pillows, and Julia had gone to put on her bonnet. Willie was lying on the sofa in the library, and Eva was standing at the window silently watching her father. Her heart was full; but her sister's lesson the day before made her strive hard to keep down her feelings, even though she now felt quite secure against misconstruction. Presently Willie said:

"It is time for you to get your bonnet, Eva."

"I am not going to town, Willie," she answered.

"Why not?"

"Because," she replied, evasively, "you ought to have the whole carriage to yourself, and papa and sister are going in the buggy, so that there is no room for me."

"I cannot possibly occupy the whole carriage, Eva, and if I go alone, the ride will be a very lonely one."

"Then sister will go with you, and papa can go alone."

"Will you not go with me if I ask it?"

"I would rather not, Willie. I prefer parting with my friends at my own home. I did not go to town when Walter went away."

"Eva, it is my special request, and my last. You need not go to the railroad; I only ask you to ride with me to town. You can stop at Uncle John's. Will you go?"

She did not reply; but went immediately to her room, and in a few minutes returned ready for the ride.

Willie was assisted into the carriage, pillows and cushions were arranged to support him, Eva took her seat opposite, and the order was given to drive on slowly. He could not move his body, but his eyes turned with the windings of the road, and lingered upon the Hall as long as roof or chimney was visible. At last, when it was completely hidden from view, he said:

"Farewell, dear old Hall, for a little while, but only for a

very little while! In three weeks I shall certainly see you again."

"Not certainly, Willie, but only conditionally. You are not to come unless we are free, and you are better."

"The first condition I shall certainly observe, for it would be wrong to run any risk of that sort to enjoy the pleasure of seeing anybody; but the second I beg leave to use my own discretion about. Whether I am better or not, if it is safe, and I am able to get here at all, I shall certainly come. Shall I have the welcome that I would desire?"

"Yes, such a one as you cannot complain of, and it may be, along with it, a hearty scolding for coming at all, if you were imprudent in doing so. I do hope, however, that by that time you will be not only able to come back, but also to take some exercise. I want you to walk with me through the grove, and along the brook. Even if it is winter, you will be able to form some idea of my beautiful rambles when the trees are bright and green, and the woods are full of wild flowers, and the waters ripple along with such a sweet, refreshing sound. I love the old Hall, Willie," she added, "and every spot around it!"

"And so do I, Eva," he answered, earnestly.

They were silent for some time, and then he said, suddenly:

"Eva, I specially regret the hurried manner in which I am compelled to go away now. Mr. Derby has talked to me a great deal, so has your sister, and I have thought a great deal since I have been lying on my bed of pain. I have never been baptized. I do not want to go back into the army without it, and I particularly want Mr. Derby to do it, and have for some weeks intended that he should, just as soon as I was able to go to town."

"Oh, Willie!" she answered, "I am so glad to hear you say that. I can let you go a great deal more willingly now! Mr. Derby will baptize you when you come back."

"Yes, Eva, and that shall be one great inducement to come in spite of obstacles. Indeed, nothing shall prevent my return except impossibilities. But it may be that I cannot get here. The Federals may occupy the place in three weeks, or my condition may be such as to render locomotion impossible."

"Then Mr. Derby will go to you, and he will do it with the greatest pleasure. But, Willie, I always hope for the best, and so must you. Let us both expect that you will come back almost well, and that on a clear, bright Sunday morning, our hearts will be gladdened by seeing you baptized into the fold of the church. Oh, Willie, sister will be so glad!"

"And she may well be, Eva," he replied, with feeling, "since

she herself has had no little to do with it. It may be that I owe to Cameron Hall, and to Mr. Derby, more than the life of the body!"

They talked no more during the drive to town. It took them a long time to get there, and when they stopped at Uncle John's gate, Mr. Cameron and Julia, who had been waiting a long while for them, said that there was no time to spare, and that they must hurry to the depot.

"Good-by, Willie!" said Eva. "I must leave you now. Good-by! God bless you!"

"God bless you, Eva!" he said, grasping her hand. "God bless you, my more than friend!"

He held her hand firmly, and looked earnestly at her for a moment, and then she sprang out of the carriage, and, rushing into the house, went into Uncle John's room and bolted the door. The long pent-up feelings burst forth now, and there was no need to restrain them. She did not know how long they had been gone, but the railroad whistle, as the train moved off, startled her, and she hastily bathed her face and brushed her hair, and tried to remove all traces of her grief before the party should return.

"I don't know how it is," she said to herself, "that it grieves me so to give up my friends. Other people either do not feel it so much, or have the power to control themselves. I wish," she added, as she felt herself giving way again, "I wish from the bottom of my heart that I never could make another friend while I live! I thought when Walter went away that it was the greatest grief that I ever could have, and was truly thankful that I had not another brother to give up, and now I am almost as much distressed to part with Willie as I was with Walter! No, I don't want to make any more friends; it causes too much pain to give them up!"

When she reached home, she congratulated herself that she had been able to keep back her tears. She did not know that her swollen eyes, and flushed cheeks, and unwonted silence had told the tale as plainly as tears or words could have done. Once at home, however, she no longer tried to restrain herself. A glance into Willie's room, as she passed the door, was enough, and she hastened to her own room, and throwing herself upon the bed, gave way to another burst of grief.

"Best to let her alone," thought Julia, as she checked herself upon the threshold. "She will be soonest relieved by thus emptying her heart. Mistaken child! This is no sister's love, no sister's grief; she herself will before long discover the difference!"

She went quietly away, and left Eva all day by herself. She took advantage of the freedom thus afforded her, and if tears could have relieved her, she would have wept her grief all away in a single day.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILLIE had been gone a week, and the days and hours at the Hall had seemed long and quiet, even to Julia, while to Eva they had been almost intolerable. The expected raid of the enemy had not taken place, and apprehension had almost died out, so that there was not even the excitement of alarm to vary the monotony of their life. There was no stirring news from the army: letters from Walter and Willie, and their answers, were the only events, if such they could be called, in the calm routine of their life. The daily letter came from Willie, and the daily response was as duly sent, and Eva had already found in one short week that it cost, indeed, no effort to write to him, that it was rather the one pleasure to which she looked forward all the rest of the day.

Julia saw the regular interchange of these letters with a sad longing for a similar pleasure; for this constant and unrestrained intercourse contrasted painfully with the starvation of her own heart. Charles Beaufort had scrupulously obeyed her command. Neither letter, word, message, nor reminder of any sort had ever come to her. Many months had now passed away; his letters to Uncle John were neither frequent nor long, and sometimes he would forget for days to mention the reception of one, and then would say, casually:

“By-the-way, girls, I forgot to tell you. I had a letter from Charles some days ago, and, as usual, he spoke in the kindest terms of the Hall, and desired to be remembered to Mr. Cameron and the young ladies.”

Occasionally there would be a special message to his young friend, Eva, but to Julia, nothing. The only allusion to her was in connection with her father and sister, as a member of the same household. And this was all: such a passing recognition of her existence as any stranger might have made; such a cold mention of her name as he might have made of that of any other woman in the world; such a message of respectful indifference as chilled her to the heart, and made her wish that he would never again even allude to her in Uncle John's letters. And while she felt that it was her own decree, yet at times she found herself indulging a momentary dissatisfaction with his

strict obedience, and a conviction that if his heart had been strongly and earnestly interested, he would have found it impossible thus to restrain himself. Such feelings, however, were only for a moment, for Julia was neither unreasonable nor capricious. She had not acted from impulse at first. What she did, she had done deliberately, and because she believed that it would be best in the end for both. She had been sincere and in earnest in her prohibition of all intercourse, for while the fear of indifference or forgetfulness cost her a bitter pang, yet under the circumstances she knew that it would be best, and she really desired to avoid everything that could make him cherish her memory. But while Julia was neither capricious, unreasonable, nor insincere, she was yet a woman, with a warm, loving heart, whose affections, in spite of herself, would respond to that manly love which she felt had been sincerely offered to her; and it is not to be wondered at if her heart would sometimes cry out and rebel against the discipline which she honestly believed was right and necessary. And so whenever she felt this momentary disappointment, this longing wish that he would only once break through all restraint and send her personally one message or one letter, she instantly checked the rising feeling, and put down with an effort all such wrong, vain desires. She had never yet asked Uncle John a question about him. All that she knew of him, of his health, his employments, and his plans, she learned either through Uncle John's voluntary communications, or from his answers to the questions of her father and Eva. For a long time Eva had questioned him very closely about Dr. Charles's letters, but afterward her attention was so much engrossed by Willie, that although she did not altogether lose her interest in her former friend, yet her inquiries were neither so frequent nor so minute, and Julia consequently knew much less about him. So matters now stood, and no wonder that Julia scarcely ever saw Eva break the seal of Willie's regular letters without a sigh, and a wish that it had been right for her to enjoy the same privilege.

It was now December, cold and bleak. Rambles in the woods, musings along the bank of the quiet stream, horseback rides, were all over now, and Eva, shut in from all these pleasures, tried to find her accustomed refuge in the library. But books were no longer the same companions that they had once been, and even the most exciting romance failed now to fix her attention. The moment that she took a book in her hand she began to think. Next to Willie's own room, there was no place about the house so intimately associated with the thought of him as was the library. The sofa had been his accustomed place from the time that he could leave his room, and the little chair beside it was

tacitly surrendered to her as specially her own. If she went to the bookcase for a book, she involuntarily took down one which she had read to him, and when she opened it, some familiar passage, with his commentary upon it, would at once set her to dreaming of the pleasant past. There was something in the very aspect of the room that spoke to her heart of Willie; and while for that very reason she preferred staying there to any other part of the house, still she was accustomed to say that "she ought never to go into the library, it made her lazy, for while she was there she never did anything but think."

The sisters were sitting there together one cold morning, before a blazing fire. Of late Julia had not read so much as formerly, her experience being the same as Eva's, that as soon as she took a book she began to think. So she had busied herself more than ever with the active duties of housekeeping. The room was very quiet. Julia was sewing rapidly, Eva was sitting with a book in her hand looking dreamily into the fire, and Carlo was stretched on the rug at her feet. Mr. Cameron usually rode into town in the morning, and brought the letters and papers with him on his return.

Eva looked up at the clock, and yawning wearily, said: "Almost twelve o'clock! I wonder what can keep papa so long this morning! I do wish that he would come along with my letter. I cannot wait much longer."

"How long have you waited, Eva?"

"A whole hour, sister. Papa is generally at home by eleven o'clock."

"Does it seem so hard, Eva," said Julia, with a sad smile, "to wait one hour for an expected letter? Suppose that it should not come at all."

"That is simply impossible."

"Not by any means, Eva. Many things might happen to prevent its being written, or its safe arrival. Suppose now that papa should come without it, what would you do?"

"I suppose, sister, that I would be silly enough to cry, for that is usually the first thing that I do when I am troubled. But, indeed, if I do not get my letter, I shall be not only disappointed, but anxious too, for I know that Willie will not fail to write if it is possible."

"Do you always expect a daily letter from Willie, Eva?"

"No; not when he goes into service again, for Walter does not write oftener than once a week; but that is in the future. For the present, I expect a letter every day; and if I don't get it I shall be disappointed, distressed, and provoked."

"How do you think that you would get along for weeks and

months without ever receiving a line from him, and without ever hearing from him directly?"

"Oh, sister!" she exclaimed, "what questions you do ask! Indeed, I don't know how I should get along under such circumstances, for I don't, like you, try to decide what I should do in impossible emergencies."

"Not so impossible after all, Eva! If the Federals should occupy this place, you may possibly not hear from Walter or Willie while they stay; and even if you do, the information and the letters will be both unsatisfactory and received at long intervals."

"Oh, sister!" she said, "you cannot be in earnest!"

"Indeed, I am. All communication between us and our army will then be cut off."

"That would be the worst trouble of all! Never to hear from Walter or Willie! Sister, how could we bear it? what should we do?"

"We should try and submit to it as patiently and uncomplainingly as we could, and accept it as one of the many great privations that the war entails upon us."

"You, perhaps, can do this, for you are naturally quiet and patient; but for me it would be quite impossible. If I love anybody, I love with my whole heart; and to be separated from my friends, to know that they are always in danger, that they may be at any moment suffering or even dying, and yet I cannot hear it, and may not know it for weeks, perhaps months afterward,—indeed, sister, I could not bear this long, it would soon kill me."

"No, Eva, you would probably survive it, as many have done and are doing now, whose hearts are just as warm and loving as yours. I am afraid that bitter experience will teach us many lessons during this war, which now it seems impossible to learn."

"But you know, sister, that trouble affects people differently, and some much more than others. You and I for instance would be differently affected by the very same trouble. You would bear it quietly, patiently, and as a matter of course, while I would make myself sick crying."

"I might, and most probably would, take it quietly, Eva; but by no means as a matter of course. My experience and observation both teach me that quiet people suffer most, for the impulsive relieve themselves by the very violence of their grief."

"That may be, but impulsive people have generally most ties to break, and therefore are more frequently called upon to suffer. They, much oftener than quiet persons, form warm friendships

and ardent attachments on slender foundations. Look at us. I learn to love strangers, if they are lovable, a great deal sooner than you do. Here is Willie, who came to us a few months ago a perfect stranger. In that short time I have learned to love him almost like a brother, and it distressed me almost as much to give him up as it did to give up Walter, while, on the contrary, you bore his departure with the utmost composure."

"I am very much attached to Willie," answered Julia, quietly. "My love for him cannot be better described than to call it sisterly."

"And yet, you are not half so much grieved to give him up as I am. It was the same case too with Dr. Beaufort, who was essentially much more your friend than mine. I was truly distressed when I saw him go off to the army, but you did not seem to mind it."

Julia's lip quivered; but she sewed on, and made no reply. Eva, who was still watching for her father, now saw him coming in the gate, and springing up, she ran to meet him, sure of getting the expected letter.

A few silent tears dropped on Julia's work, as she thought: "'Did not seem to mind it!' Ah, Eva, how little do you or anybody else know how a quiet heart may suffer all alone! Little do you dream what a burden I have borne for weary months, and expect to bear through a weary life!"

Eva now came bounding in with an open letter, long and closely written, and sat down by the sofa in her little chair, the place where she always read Willie's letters.

"No letter from Walter, daughter," Mr. Cameron said, in answer to Julia's inquiring look.

"Is there any news in town, papa?"

"Nothing of interest from the army. The town is full of rumors again, and the community quite excited by the reported approach of a Yankee raiding party. I could not, however, hear anything that seemed reliable, and so it really made very little impression upon me."

"Yes," said Julia, "we have been so often unnecessarily alarmed, that these rumors now do not even create anxiety. But, papa, what is the object of these raiding parties?"

"It is, my daughter, to inflict as much injury as possible in a little time; to destroy public and private property, government stores, and, in short, to do as much damage generally as they can."

"But what would be the object of coming to so small a place as Hopedale? There are no government stores here, and but very little public property."

"The railroad is used in government service, and has proved very useful in transporting troops and army supplies. The country around is very fertile and was carefully cultivated this year, and it is known that we have gathered in most abundant harvests. You have no idea, Julia, how much food for man and beast is stored away in the hundreds of barns in this county alone."

"But, papa, surely they cannot intend to destroy food! our subsistence, our life!"

"That, my daughter, is their principal object, to destroy as much of what sustains life, and to reduce the rebels, as they call us, as nearly to starvation as possible. If they come, they will desolate the country like the locusts of Egypt. But while the destruction of food and government property is their chief aim, there are other things which they will be careful not to neglect. Searching and pillaging houses, and sometimes even burning them; insulting and terrifying women and children, forcing the surrender of money and valuables by the irresistible argument of a loaded pistol,—these are some of the pleasant anticipations connected with a raiding party. Not a very agreeable picture, is it, daughter?"

"No, indeed, sir," answered Julia, thoughtfully. "If such are to be the proceedings, how glad I am that we are not in town! Don't you think it would be better for Grace and Agnes to come out to the Hall for protection?"

"On the contrary, if I were only sure that these rumors were true, I would immediately send you and Eva to town, for these raiders are always more lawless and outrageous in the country than they are in towns. The thought of you causes me far more anxiety than everything else. I could give up furniture, carriage, horses, even house and——"

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, "not our horses! not Rebel and Dixie! our beautiful horses!"

"Yes, my daughter, not only your beautiful riding horses to which you are so much attached, but every valuable horse and mule on the plantation will be taken away. Those that they do not want themselves they will take off to the army. I am sorry, my daughter, to have to tell you these things. I do not wish to frighten you, but to prepare you."

"Yes, papa, I would rather know it now. I do not like to be taken by surprise, for then I never know exactly how to act."

"The only way to act in all such cases, Julia, is to be perfectly quiet, and to do or say nothing to exasperate. You cannot stop the work of destruction, but you may perhaps aggravate it."

"It would be very hard, papa, to stand by and witness in si-

lence the desolation of your home by Yankee ruffians. I doubt very much whether I could do it."

"Yes, Julia, it is hard enough, perhaps almost impossible for some natures; but, believe me, it is the wisest plan. You could do it, for you can control yourself, and you would do it if I should request it for my sake, as well as your own. Remember, my daughter," he added, seriously, "I tell you now, that if you should ever be placed in these circumstances, you must be quiet; otherwise, you might endanger your father as well as yourself."

"That, indeed, papa," she answered, earnestly, "is argument enough to enforce silence. You can trust me now."

"I know it, Julia; but as to Eva, I could not trust her, for I know that she would not hold her tongue."

"Hold my tongue when, papa?" inquired Eva, looking up as she folded her letter and gave it to her sister. "What are you talking about?"

Her father explained, and she said:

"No, indeed, I could never hold my tongue and see my home sacked and plundered by brutal soldiers! I would have to speak once, and tell them what I thought of them, at the risk of making acquaintance with the bayonet."

"And I shall see to it, Eva," replied her father, "that you are never tempted. Whenever the time comes, I shall never leave the house, and if it is searched, I myself will be master of ceremonies."

"Papa," said Julia, "it must be much harder for a man than for a woman to bear such things as these in silence. You have been accustomed all your life to protect yourself and your household, and I believe that it would be impossible for you to submit to such indignity, and see your house plundered before your eyes without making an effort to defend it. And since any such effort might result in something dreadful, suppose that you let me take your place, and if the house should be searched, let me accompany them through it. I know that I could now see them do anything without a word of complaint, for the thought of endangering you would enable me to resist any temptation to speak. Will you, papa?"

"Not for the world, Julia! It is no woman's business, especially so young a one as you are. It is my duty to guard my daughters if I cannot protect my property, and I shall at least try to do so. And now, girls, remember, it is not only my request, but my positive command, that if a raiding party should ever come to the Hall, you shall, both of you, keep out of sight, and let me attend to them."

He left the room, and Eva exclaimed, impatiently:

"No peace or quiet of our lives! Before we are quite settled down from one alarm we are stirred up by another, and all for nothing, too! The Yankees have no idea of coming here; they have more important work elsewhere."

"I trust that you are right, Eva," answered her sister; "but how is this? I thought that the complaint all along had been that our life was too monotonous and quiet; and now, as soon as the excitement comes, you begin to complain of that!"

"It is not excitement that I object to; it is the particular kind that I do not like. Nobody likes the excitement of fear. I am sick and tired of this miserable war! It takes away all the pleasure of life. Here Willie is writing so hopefully of his anticipated visit in a fortnight, and before I finish reading the letter, I hear of a Yankee raid, which will, of course, put an end to his coming altogether."

"Which will," replied Julia, "probably be the least dreadful result to be apprehended. If papa's statement of their general mode of procedure be correct, the loss of Willie's visit, however great a disappointment ordinarily, will now scarcely be thought of. Eva, what will you do when you see a Yankee mount Dixie and ride off?"

"What!" she exclaimed, jumping up, "who says that any of them would dare do such a thing?"

"Dare, child!" repeated Julia. "In war, people dare to do anything. But papa says that the stables will be among the first places that they will visit, and that not only Rebel and Dixie, but all the other horses there, and all the plantation mules and horses besides, will be taken."

"Well, I solemnly declare that whatever you and papa do, I will never stand by and see them take Dixie without speaking a word upon the subject."

"Not after what papa said just now, Eva?"

"Yes, sister, even after what he said just now; for if I were to see a Yankee thief mount Dixie, I could no more help talking than I could help breathing."

"Then, Eva, I think papa will show his wisdom by shutting you up where you can neither see, hear, nor talk. For myself, I intend to do just what he says. Poor papa! in a case like this he would have enough to bear, and I would try very hard not to add to his burden."

"Very well, sister, you can do it, for you can control yourself, but for me it would be simply impossible."

That night, when her father and Eva were asleep, Julia went out and called Uncle Billy, the confidential servant of the Hall, into the library. She told him of the various rumors, and asked

him if there was no place about the plantation where he could conceal the riding horses, at least for a few days. He thought that there was, and she told him that as they did not know at what moment the enemy might come, she thought it would be best at once, in the quiet and darkness of the night, to secrete them as best he could, and she urged him to tell nobody, not even her father or herself, where they were. The old man went off to obey, and then she put away, in what she supposed a safe place, her mother's silver tea-service. Some other valuables she also concealed, and then, late at night, she went to bed, but not to sleep. Such employment was new to her, and there was an excitement about it which effectually put sleep to flight, and she thought all night of what she would do in an emergency, and tried to calm her fears and look steadily and bravely at what was probably before her.

The next morning, while they were at the breakfast-table, Mr. Cameron received a note from one of his neighbors, requesting him to come and see him on urgent business. As he mounted his horse, he said:

"Before I return, girls, I will go to town and hear the morning rumors. I will not be gone long, however, and," he added, with a smile, "I hope to be able to report that this, like all the other threatened invasions, has vanished into thin air."

He had been gone about an hour. Eva was in the library writing to Willie, and Julia was busy with her morning duties, when all at once Mammy Nancy burst into the room, the picture of terror.

"Lord have mercy, Miss Julia! Run to the window and look down the road at the soldiers! Who is they? Is they Yankees? Whar is they gwine? What is they gwine to do to us?"

Julia sprang to the window, and her heart leaped into her throat when she saw a squad of soldiers in Federal uniform halted at the lawn gate. They stopped a few minutes, and seemed to be talking earnestly, and pointing in several directions; then a party of ten rode into the lawn, and the others went up the road.

Julia rushed to the hall door, locked and barred it. Then she ran to the library, and although she tried hard to be calm, still Eva was greatly startled by the unnatural tone of voice which pronounced her name. She turned quickly round, and seeing her sister's pale face and agitated manner, she dropped her pen, exclaiming:

"For Heaven's sake! tell me, sister, what is the matter?"

"Eva," she answered, hurriedly, and striving so hard to be calm that she seemed almost stern, "Eva, the Yankees are here now, coming up to the house. Papa is gone, and we must see

them. Promise me that you will strictly obey him and not speak one word to them."

Poor Eva looked ready to faint, and did not answer. A violent jerk at the bell now announced the unwelcome arrival, and at the same instant three horsemen passed the window on their way to the kitchen.

"Promise me, Eva."

"I will try, sister."

Another violent jerk of the bell, and a thundering knock at the door, bade Julia hasten, and she ran and opened it herself. A lieutenant was the spokesman.

"This is the residence of Mr. Henry Cameron, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir, there is no one at home except his two daughters, myself and a younger sister."

"I am sorry to disturb you, especially since you are alone; but I have been ordered to come here and search for arms, and a rebel soldier who is or has been here within the past day or two."

Julia said nothing in reply about arms, for she knew that her father had a very valuable pair of revolvers which he would be most unwilling to lose, but she answered:

"I assure you, sir, that there is no Confederate soldier here, nor has been within a day or two."

"Well, perhaps not so recently as that; but you have had one here."

"Yes, sir, one who was wounded at Manassas; but he left us more than a week ago. A search for soldiers in this house would not repay you for the trouble, for I assure you that you would neither find them nor anything belonging to them."

"Nevertheless, I am ordered to search, and a soldier, you know, must obey orders. Boys, two of you come with me into the house, the rest of you guard it, so that no one escapes."

Julia felt somewhat relieved at the idea of looking for soldiers, for she thought that this would not require a minute search, and that they would soon be satisfied. She had not yet learned that this was the common pretext on which every house was entered. As her father was not there, she thought it her duty to go with them, and, afraid to go alone, she summoned Mammy Nancy and Eva to accompany her. Seizing Eva by the arm, she whispered, hurriedly:

"Remember, now, not one word!"

They were soon satisfied in the parlor and library, but when they came to the dining-room, the examination was more minute. By this time Eva's fears were somewhat calmed, but her indigna-

tion was rapidly rising to fever-heat. As she saw some silver spoons and forks find their way into the lieutenant's pocket, she exclaimed; hastily :

"Those are not soldiers ! I thought——"

A pressure upon her arm, so tight as to be painful, admonished her, and she stopped short.

The search proceeded, and presently they went up stairs. In Mr. Cameron's room nothing escaped. Wardrobe, bureau-drawers, private secretary, all were pulled to pieces, and their contents thrown upon the floor in wild confusion. Julia looked on in silent anxiety, fearing every moment that the pistols would be found ; but they were not forthcoming. The next room that they entered was Willie's, and Eva found it doubly hard to control herself here.

"This, ladies, I believe," said the lieutenant, walking in, "is the room that was occupied by the rebel soldier. We must make a thorough search here."

Eva's writing-desk, containing Willie's letters, was upon the table, and while the others were busy with drawers and trunks, the officer deliberately seated himself to the examination of the desk.

Julia just succeeded in arresting the exclamation bursting from Eva's lips.

"Where is the key of this desk, ladies?" he asked, as he tried it, and found it locked.

"Give him the key, Eva," Julia whispered, "or he will break it open."

"Let him do it, then !" replied the indignant Eva.

With a bland smile, the officer said :

"Don't trouble yourselves, ladies, about the key ; I do not need it."

In an instant the lock was forced, and the desk was open.

"Lord help us !" exclaimed Mammy Nancy, "if he ain't done broke the child's box open !"

Eva stood by with flashing eyes and trembling limbs, and feeling that her heart would burst if she had to bear this much longer in silence. Julia watched her with the greatest anxiety, fearing every moment lest she should break through all restraint, and satisfied, from the appearance and manner of the man in whose power they were, that her father's apprehensions had not been exaggerated, nor his warning unnecessary.

One by one, Willie's letters were taken out, and the superscription and postmark examined ; but they were not opened, and Eva drew a sigh of relief as she saw them laid down upon the table. As if to prolong her torture, the lieutenant now proceeded de-

liberately to remove all the contents of the desk; and even the blank paper, envelopes, and pens were subjected to a scrutinizing gaze before they were laid aside.

"Rebel stamps!" he said, scornfully, as he held them up. "Pity that they could not find a better face to put on them than that of the archtraitor Jeff!"

There was no reply. One by one each cover of the various little compartments was removed, and they were peered into with an insulting curiosity that was absolutely intolerable. At last he seemed satisfied, and began slowly to restore the contents to the desk.

Eva could bear no more. She felt that she would die if she did not speak, and so, resolutely shutting her eyes to her sister's beseeching and warning face, she exclaimed, trembling with passion:

"Surely, sir, you have not yet finished searching a lady's writing-desk for arms and soldiers! There is still one little compartment, about as large as your finger-nail, which you have not opened. Do look into it; perhaps you will find there a rebel lieutenant-general, two brigadiers, and a columbiad!"

The scorn and contempt which flashed from her eyes were beyond the power of words to express, and Julia saw with an agony of fear that they had aroused all the venom of their foe, who replied:

"I am quite satisfied with my search of your writing-desk, Miss; but since you advise me to examine further, I will look into these letters. I scarcely expect to find in them either a brigadier or a columbiad, but it may be that I will find treason:" and he proceeded quietly to the perusal of Willie's long and closely written pages.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs was now heard, a rapid, determined stride was upon the stairs, and in another moment Mr. Cameron was in the room. The insolent air of the officer, Julia's anxious face, Eva's defiant expression, and Mammy Nancy's helpless fright, were all comprehended at a glance.

Mr. Cameron felt that he was too much excited to trust himself to speak at all, and he stood for a few moments biting his lips and glaring in silent rage upon the scene before him. For once he felt that his daughters were a clog and fetter to him, for once the kindly feelings of his nature were turned into gall and a thirst for blood; and as he stood there, the owner of the mansion, the father of his young daughters, the protector of his dependents, bound hand and foot, unable to lift a finger to defend them against insult and outrage, he ground his teeth in impotent rage, and felt that if those daughters were only out of the way, he would at any

and all hazards acquaint one Yankee marauder, at least, with the lead of that revolver which his hand now instinctively grasped. But even when most excited, Mr. Cameron's judgment was never obscured by blind passion. He determined that he would not speak until he had had time to collect his thoughts and control his feelings, and a moment's reflection convinced him that, for the sake of his helpless daughters, and to save them from something worse than they had yet endured, he must curb and restrain himself.

Presently he said, in a low voice :

"Come, my daughters, this is no place for you."

He took a hand of each and led them down stairs into the library, and bade them lock themselves in.

"Papa," pleaded Eva, clinging to his arm, please to get my letters away from that Yankee. Don't let him take them off with him."

"Be quiet, Eva," said Mr. Cameron almost sternly; "be quiet, my daughter!"

He saw the tears gather in her eyes, and stroking her hair, added, kindly: "I will get them if I can, my daughter; but you know that your father is powerless now."

So saying, he closed the door and returned up stairs to watch the work of desolation.

There was no longer any need of restraint, and throwing herself upon the sofa, Eva's overcharged feelings burst forth in passionate tears.

"I am a woman," she sobbed, "and I cannot defend myself, and none but a sneaking coward would thus insult the defenseless; but if I had been a man, that Yankee would never have reached the bottom of the first page of that letter without a bullet through his head, even if every bayonet in this yard had pierced my body the next minute!"

"Oh, Eva, Eva!" exclaimed Julia, "you must not talk so. You are in a passion now, and don't know what you are saying. Believe me, papa is right; dignified silence is the only hope of safety."

"Dignified silence, indeed!" she exclaimed, passionately, "when an insulting Yankee is reading, before my eyes, letters as sacred as the thoughts and feelings of my own heart! I cannot keep silence; I must talk; and I should have bursted with rage just now, if I had not said what I did to him about that desk."

"No, you would not, Eva; and the effort to restrain yourself, however great, would have been amply repaid; for if you had not said anything, your letters would have been returned to the writing-desk unread."

"Never, sister! Yankee curiosity could not have resisted such an opportunity of prying into private affairs. No, he intended from the first to read them, but he only wanted to torture me a little more by awakening hopes of release, which he intended to disappoint."

"You are severe upon the Yankees, Eva," said Julia, with a quiet smile at her sister's uncontrollable rage. "I never saw you in such a passion before in all your life."

"I have had enough to provoke a——"

She was interrupted by a piercing shriek, and the cry of "fire! fire!" was taken up and repeated by terrified voices. Julia ran to one window and Eva to another, and the latter exclaimed: "Oh, sister! it is the barns. They have fired the barns!"

From the window where they stood, they watched the long, black, curling smoke, that wound up from the roofs of the several granaries where Mr. Cameron had stowed away the abundant harvests of his fields. Presently a shaft of dark, lurid fire leaped high into the air, and burst into a sheet of flame, which speedily wrapped all the buildings in one grand conflagration. Mr. Cameron stood upon the veranda, and with folded arms and a clouded brow watched the rapid destruction, and groaned in spirit as he thought of the numbers around him who were dependent upon those barns for the food to sustain life. Crash after crash was heard, as roofs, walls, and blazing rafters tumbled in, and blended with charred and burning masses of corn, wheat, and rye, in one smoking ruin.

"Now, boys, for the smoke-house!" was the next cry, and they proceeded forthwith to that department.

"Bring a fire-brand, Jim!" shouted one of the soldiers to another, who was lingering behind at the barns.

"No, boys," called out the lieutenant, "no more burning! The smoke-house is too near the dwelling, and there is no use in burning that now. Bring the meat out and throw it in a pile in the yard, and then set fire to it."

The house was rapidly emptied, and the meat, which Mr. Cameron had hoped would supply his plantation for two years, was soon thrown in a pile and awaited the torch.

All a Southern negro's idea of comfort and abundance is embodied in the smoke-house; and while the servants had stood by in silent dismay, and watched the burning of the corn that was to make their bread, they could not see the meat consumed without expostulation or remonstrance.

"Lord help us, Mister!" exclaimed Mammy Nancy, "'taint possible that you is gwine to burn up all that meat! what is we gwine to live on?"

"That is none of my business, old lady!" was the reply.

"Well, what is the sense of burnin' it up? It won't do you no good if it's burnt up."

"No; but then it can't do the rebels any good either."

"Well, Mister, for the Lord's sake, jest let me jerk up a piece or two before you put that fire to it."

"If you want it for yourself, I have no objection; but you shan't save any for your master, as he calls himself. Remember, old woman! I am coming back here before long, and if I find that you have saved it for him, I will put this bayonet right through you."

As he said this, he touched her hand with the point of his bayonet, and as she felt the cold steel, the old woman dropped her meat and exclaimed, in a terrified voice: "Lord have mercy on me! Look here, Mister: what make you hate master so? What's he done?"

"He is a rebel, old lady."

"A devil!" she exclaimed. "Now God knows that ain't so. I've lived with him thirty years this comin' Christmas, and I ain't never seed none of the devil about him yet. I tell you, sir, that's the gospel truth."

"Hurrah, old lady," exclaimed the lieutenant, "I accept the altered name, and thank you for it, too! But I can tell you one thing, that if the rebels are not devils, they have at least got the devil in them, and we are going to take him out."

"Take care, Mister," she answered, squaring herself, and conscious of her superior wisdom; "take care, then, for if the devil is in 'em, and you are fightin' agin him, you'll be apt to have the worst of it. I know something about him, I do. I've seed him, and I've felt his power, too. Sure as you is born, sir, you is fightin' agin mighty great odds, and if the Lord don't help you, you is swamped!"

"But we expect Him to help us," he answered, laughing, "for they say that He always helps the right; but see here, old woman, if you don't stop preaching and get some of that bacon out of that pile, it will be so far gone, presently, that the devil himself could not save it for you. I am going to throw this brand into it this minute."

"Come here, Jim and Bob!" she shouted. "Run boys, run, you lazy rascals! Pick up some of this meat and pitch it off into a pile thar, and for God's sake don't let all the bacon burn up!"

The soldiers stood by laughing, and allowed her to take off several pieces; and as she and the boys started off to her cabin with her rescued treasure, the officer called out:

"Remember, old woman, that is yours; it is not for anybody else."

"Yes, Master!" she answered, loudly, and then muttered to herself: "Yes, it's this nigger's now, sure; and if it is, I'm gwine to do what I please with it; and if my master and them two children that I nursed, Julia and Eva, don't get some of it, then old Nancy won't neither—that's so! I always thought that Yankees was folks before, but if they is, the devil is in 'em sure, instead of bein' in master, as that fellow said; for nothin' else under heaven but a Yankee or the devil would be fool enough to burn up a smoke-house full of meat!"

The soldiers stood by and watched the burning meat, opening it occasionally with their bayonets, so that the fire should reach every piece; and when they saw the whole one blazing mass, from which none could be rescued, a voice said: "Now for the stable, boys! There must be fine horses at such a place as this!"

Eva was still standing at the library window looking out at the scene, and although she could not hear the words, she saw the direction in which they went, and exclaimed, in a voice of despair: "There, now! they are gone to the stables! I must go, sister," she added, suddenly, and with energy, as she went toward the door. "They shall not have Dixie!"

"Stop, Eva!" said Julia, catching her by the arm. "Stop and listen. You must not, you need not go out of this room. They will not find Dixie, or Rebel, or papa's riding horse either, in the stables."

"What do you mean, sister?"

"I mean that I have had them taken out and put somewhere else."

"Oh! what a thoughtful sister you are!" exclaimed Eva, joyfully. "Where did you hide them?"

"I don't know. I left that to Uncle Billy's discretion. He took them away last night; but you must not say anything about it, for if it should be known, it would get the old man into trouble."

"Bless you, and bless Uncle Billy, too!" exclaimed the grateful Eva. "I would rather that you should have saved Dixie than anything that I own."

"He may not be saved yet, Eva, for the Yankees may find him even now. You have seen that nothing escapes them. However, Uncle Billy and I have done our best."

"Why didn't you tell him to hide them all, sister? He might as well have tried to save the carriage and buggy horses, too."

"No, Eva, it would at once have created a suspicion, if the

stables had been found empty, and besides, it would have been impossible to hide so many. I knew that some were obliged to go, and I only tried to save the three that we valued most. I am very anxious about them yet, and shall never feel that they are safe until the last Yankee has disappeared from Hopedale. If I succeed in saving them this time, I am resolved that Rebel shall never run any more risks of this sort. I shall send him to the army."

"Oh, sister! give Rebel away! I thought that you loved him as much as you did any of the rest of us."

"Scarcely so much as that, Eva," she replied, with a smile, "though I am warmly attached to him, and there are few things at the Hall that I would not sooner give up; but I would much rather know that he was killed or worn out in the Confederate service, than to see a Yankee mounted on him or leading him away by a halter, as that one is doing the carriage horse now."

The work of desolation seemed now complete. The house had been ransacked, the barns burned, the bacon destroyed, and the horses stolen, but there were still minor injuries to be inflicted which could not be neglected. Every gun was discharged, and its contents lodged in some unfortunate fowl that was walking in fancied security about the yard. Some of them were carried off, but the greater portion were left where they fell, as tokens of the wantonness of their destruction.

"Are these all the horses that Mr. Cameron has?" inquired the lieutenant of a negro boy, who stood with his hands in his pockets, staring with open eyes and mouth, and wondering that the master, whom he thought omnipotent, should quietly permit these men to take the horses that he so much valued.

"No, sir. Master had three more beauties, heap prettier than them, but this mornin', when Uncle Billy went to the stable, somebody had done draw'd the staple, and all three was gone. Somebody stole 'em last night. They was the young ladies' and master's riding horses."

"Perhaps your master has hid them somewhere?"

"No, sir, that he ain't! Master never hid nothin' in his life; and besides," he added, with a knowing look, "I'd like to see anybody hide a horse on this 'ere plantation whar this nigger couldn't find it. No, sir; them horses ain't here; them horses is stole sure!"

There was such an air of positive assurance in the declaration, that whatever doubts of its truth the Yankee might have had, he was nevertheless satisfied that the boy himself believed what he had said, and seeing nothing more at present on which to exert his destructive energies, he collected his men for their departure.

As he passed Mr. Cameron, who was standing upon the porch, the lieutenant bowed, and said :

"This is very disagreeable work, sir, I assure you, but my orders were imperative. I hope that you will say to the ladies that I regret extremely the military necessity which compelled me to intrude upon them."

Mr. Cameron made no reply, and the party rode down the lawn. He watched them until he saw them through the gate, and then going into the library, said bitterly :

"Young ladies, the Federal lieutenant, your honorable visitor, begs me to assure you of his extreme regret at 'the military necessity,' which compelled him to intrude upon your privacy, ransack your house, destroy the meat and bread upon which you expected to live, burn your houses, and steal your horses !"

"Also," added Eva, impetuously, "to read private letters and steal spoons and forks ! Truly, it must require a great deal of courage to be a Yankee soldier ! Enough to enable him undismayed to frighten and insult helpless women and to pocket their silver !"

"It is hard, very hard to bear !" muttered Mr. Cameron. "If I had been here when they came, I should have been calmer, and could have borne it better ; but to come in as I did, and find you two girls at the mercy of that insolent ruffian, and see him engaged in his insulting work, was almost more than I could bear. It was just as much as I could do to keep my hand from my revolver."

"Speaking of your revolver, papa," said Julia, "I was very anxious about it when they were in your room, for I was sure that they would find it. They said that they came to search for arms and soldiers."

"That was the pretext, Julia, and, interpreted, it means that they came for pillage and plunder. There was, however, cause to be anxious about the pistols, for they certainly would not have left them if they had seen them. It is part of their policy to take from us all means of defending ourselves."

"Where are they, papa ?" asked Eva.

"Never mind. They were not so far off that I could not have reached them when I was watching that fellow reading those letters, and it required all my self-command to prevent me from letting him know and feel their proximity. It is hard, very hard," he added, drawing a deep, hard breath, "for a man, for a father to bear this !"

"What became of my letters, papa ?" asked Eva. "Did the gallant officer take them away ?"

"No, child, he did not want your letters, nor would he have

read them through for any consideration. It was only the desire to insult and torture you that made him subject himself to that painful 'military necessity.'"

"Sister," said Eva, "I thought that I should faint when I saw that bayonet prize open the press where the silver tea-service is kept, and you don't know how relieved I felt to see the empty shelf. What has become of it?"

"That is my business, Eva," replied Julia. "I took care of that and a few other things, last night, when everybody was asleep."

"And it is to your forethought also, Julia," said her father, "that we are indebted for the preservation of the riding horses, if, indeed, they are preserved. I am greatly afraid, however, that they will be found yet."

"Did Uncle Billy tell you where they are, papa?"

"He only informed me, with an air of great importance, this morning, when I ordered my riding horse, that he, with the two others, had been hid, according to Miss Julia's orders, and that she had forbidden him to tell anybody, even his master, where they were." "All right, Billy!" I answered, "so that you are just as careful not to tell anybody else either." He told me, also, evidently quite pleased with his own sagacity, that he drew the staple from the stable door last night, and this morning had shown it as convincing proof that the horses had been stolen. "But what will you do, Billy, when you want to put them back?" I asked. "Never mind, master," he answered. "Let me alone for that. I ain't fixed on no plan about that yit, but I'll find some way to do it. You may be sure that if I could get 'em out without anybody knowin' it, I can put 'em back too; and if I could make up one tale I can make up another." I hope that the result will allow me to be as much pleased with his sagacity in hiding horses as he evidently is himself."

"Papa," said Eva, "what do you think? If Rebel escapes the Yankees this time, sister intends to give him away!"

"Yes, sir," answered Julia, in reply to her father's inquiring look. "I am going to send him to the army."

"To whom, Julia?"

"I have not made up my mind yet. Walter, you know, cannot use him."

"Send him to Dr. Charles, sister," said Eva.

"You may do so, Eva, if you wish it, but I will not."

"Why not?"

"Simply because I do not wish to do so. I am perfectly willing," she added, with a slight flush, "that he should have Rebel,

and I will give him to you if you will make the present in your name."

"I will do it gladly enough; but what a singular person you are, sister! If I had such a present as that to make, I am sure that it should go in my own name."

"I feel otherwise," replied Julia, quietly, "and will only give the horse to you to dispose of on condition that my name shall not be mentioned at all in connection with him, and that Dr. Beaufort shall not know that he ever belonged to me."

"I accept the conditions. And so I am to have the privilege of making the present, am I?"

"Yes."

"Girls," said Mr. Cameron, "you must go up stairs and see what is to be done. I am afraid that it will take days to get everything in order again."

"Did they go into our rooms, papa?" asked Eva.

"They went everywhere, Eva, as you will find out presently. Do you think that Willie would have been very secure in that 'safe' garret where you proposed to hide him from the scrutiny of Yankee soldiers?"

"No indeed, sir! I did not know what Yankees were when I proposed to do that. I had an idea then that they were civilized."

"If you are brought into contact often with them during this war, my daughter, I am afraid you will find that you have been mistaken with regard to their character in many other respects. From my heart I wish that I could find some secure retreat in the Confederacy where I was sure that my two daughters should never again see a Yankee face."

The sisters went up stairs, and Eva stood at the door of her room and looked with dismay at the chaos out of which she was to bring order. Wardrobe doors were open, bureau drawers were sitting about on the floor, and their contents scattered in wild confusion all over the room.

"The Vandals!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "How preposterous to arm themselves with Enfield rifles to attack and rout a woman's wardrobe! An old flint-lock musket would have answered as well for such work as this."

She rang the bell, and summoning assistance, she and Julia and the servants worked hard all day, trying to restore order, and when night came, after all their labor, they seemed scarcely to have begun. After tea, Eva threw herself exhausted upon the sofa, exclaiming:

"This has been the hardest day's work of my life. I would

not object to the labor and fatigue if there had been any use in it, but to wear out one's energies and strength in doing what was wholly unnecessary would try the patience of Job!"

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, they all went to work again. Mr. Cameron and Julia were arranging the papers which had been thrown out of his desk, and Eva was collecting his scattered clothes. The sound of wheels attracted her attention, and running to the window, she exclaimed:

"Why, who on earth can that be, coming in a buggy drawn by that sorry-looking mule? Some poor neighbor, I suspect, papa, coming to 'the squire' for help and sympathy."

"The squire can give him a plenty of the last, my daughter, but, alas! not much of the first just now."

Eva watched the approaching buggy, and as it stopped at the door, she burst into a hearty laugh, saying:

"It is Uncle John, I do declare! I must run down and see that splendid animal!"

"Where did you get your fine buggy horse, Uncle John?" she asked, as she met him in the hall. "I don't think that I ever saw a finer display of ribs!"

"It is to this, my daughter, that I probably owe the privilege of coming behind him to the Hall this morning. If those ribs had been covered with a decent amount of flesh, he would have been in the Yankee service to-day."

"I suppose from this, Uncle John, that they visited your stable too."

"Not my stable only, but my whole house, to punish me doubtless for the offense of opening it to sick and wounded Confederate soldiers. They did not find anything in the house to tempt their cupidity, for you know that my furniture is plain; but it makes me groan to go into the stable. Both my fine horses gone!"

Mr. Cameron and Julia now joined them in the library, and Uncle John said:

"I came out, sir, to see for myself what depredations had been committed here. I heard the most exaggerated reports in town; and although I did not believe them, still they made me uneasy. I heard, for one thing, that they had burned your barns with all their contents."

"Which, I am sorry to say, Uncle John, is a lamentable truth. If you will look through that window, you will see in every place, where yesterday morning stood a well-filled barn, a heap of blackened ruins."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Uncle John, going to the window and looking mournfully upon the scene of desolation. "I did

not believe that they were such Vandals. If they had wanted the food themselves, I knew that they would take it; but I did not suppose that they would thus wantonly destroy it."

"Have they gone, Uncle John?" asked Julia.

"Yes, they went away last night. The town is as quiet this morning as if they had never been there."

"What damage did they do?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"They rifled stores, stole horses, threatened some rebels, as they call them, and frightened some women and children by searching houses. They did not destroy any property, however, not even the depot; but the rumor this morning is, that they have torn up the railroad for fifteen miles."

"Did they annoy Grace?" asked Julia.

"They stopped at the gate, and asked some questions of a negro, who told them that the house was occupied by a blind child and her mother, and that no rebel soldiers had stayed there, and so they passed by. I did not think that it was safe for Grace and Agnes to stay there alone last night, and insisted that they should go to Mr. Derby's; but I could not prevail upon the silly child to go, for fear that if she left her organ the Yankees would come and break it up. I could not convince her that they would not take the trouble to destroy it; neither could I persuade her that if they wanted to do it, she could not protect it. She was perfectly immovable; and the upshot of it all was that I had to yield, as I always do, and inasmuch as they ought not to stay there alone, I had to stay myself with them. Grace says that Agnes was the most miserable child yesterday that she ever saw. She would not play, and she started at the sound of every foot-step, fearing lest it might be the Yankees coming to break her organ. But this morning, since I have assured her that they are gone, she is quite happy again, and I left her playing the first joyful music since the battle of Manassas."

"Uncle John," said Eva, "did you say that the railroad had been torn up?"

"Yes, Eva, it is so reported."

"In which direction?"

"South."

"Oh, then," she exclaimed, "Willie cannot come back!"

Uncle John could not help smiling, as he replied:

"That is a calamity certainly, Eva; but there are even worse ones than that resulting from the loss of that road. When did Willie expect to return?"

"In two weeks from this time, and he will be so disappointed! Poor Willie! I am sorry for him. He has had such a lonely, wearisome time with that wound, that it seems indeed a pity that

he should be deprived of any little pleasure which he is capable of enjoying."

"He has had a long and painful time, I grant you, Eva; but I cannot agree with you in thinking that it has been either lonely or wearisome. Did it seem to you, Julia," he asked, with a twinkle in his eye, "that Willie was very much fatigued with the monotonous life at the Hall?"

"I thought," answered Julia, with a lurking smile, "that he bore it with commendable fortitude."

"I used to think him a model of patience," answered Uncle John, "when I saw him day after day in the same place on the sofa, and Eva in the same place beside him, doing the same thing, either reading or talking to him, sewing a button on for him, or arranging flowers for him. I wondered then how he could bear the monotony so well; but I never heard him complain of it once,—did you, Eva?"

"Now, Uncle John," she replied, "you might just as well stop all that. You cannot tease me now, for you have done it so long, that I am proof against it. You yourself brought Willie here, and commended him specially to my care, and begged me to help sister nurse him. I only did what you requested."

"And, of course, only because I requested it, Eva!"

"Yes, at first, but not afterward; for when I learned to know Willie I liked him for himself. He has many interesting traits of character, and these, together with my sympathy for his sufferings, and my anxiety lest traveling in his condition should cause him to suffer just as much again, have made me take almost as much interest in him as I do in Walter."

"In whom, Eva?"

"In Walter, Uncle John."

"In Walter! Whew——!" exclaimed Uncle John, prolonging the interjection most significantly and provokingly.

The crimson flush mounted in an instant to Eva's temples, and the tears rushed to her eyes. She was now thoroughly annoyed and displeased, and, getting up, she went to the window and stood looking out upon the lawn.

"You have hurt her, Uncle John," whispered Julia.

"I did not mean to do it, indeed I did not," he answered, jumping up and following her. He saw the tears in her eyes, and putting his arm around her, asked forgiveness.

"I thought that I might venture to tease you just a little, my daughter," he said, playing with one of her curls; "especially since you have just told me that you were proof against it."

"About anything else, Uncle John, but please not about Willie. Indeed," she said earnestly, and the tears came back, "I did not

dream, Uncle John, that you would misunderstand me. I thought that perhaps others might, but you never !”

If Uncle John, like Julia, thought in his heart that she was mistaken, he saw that she was at least sincere in believing that her love for Willie was altogether sisterly ; and so he accepted her explanation, and only asked :

“ Is Willie quite satisfied with this sisterly affection, Eva ?”

“ Yes, sir, he seemed so.”

“ Does he understand and believe it ?”

“ I should hope so, for he has heard it often enough, and seemed quite willing to occupy Walter’s position in the family.”

“ Doubtless, with certain members of it ; perhaps not with all.”

“ Well, Uncle John,” she replied, with the flush still upon her cheek, “ have it your own way. Fortunately, I understand you perfectly, and am accustomed to your teasing, and will try and bear it now philosophically, if by way of compensation you will take this letter to town and mail it.”

“ Who is your favored correspondent, Eva ?”

“ Willie,” she answered.

“ Perhaps you can engage my services to mail it on one condition ; and that is that I may be allowed to read the sisterly document.”

“ It would not repay you for the trouble, Uncle John.”

“ That remains to be proved. Bring it here and let me read a page, and see if I think that it is worth finishing.”

“ I am sure that you would not, sir. It is the most stupid letter that I have sent him yet. I was so tired last night, that I had not energy enough left even to abuse the Yankees. Indeed, Uncle John, you would never have the patience to wade through it.”

“ Well, I must say that it is very unkind in you to subject your weak, invalid brother to an infliction that I, in strong, robust health, could not bear. That is not sisterly, Eva,—do you think so ?”

“ Uncle John, do let me alone !” she exclaimed.

“ Julia, how often does she inflict these voluminous documents on Willie ?”

“ I believe, sir, that she sends him one every day.”

“ Every day ! Worse and worse ! I declare, Eva, that is outrageous ! I know that you would treat your brother Walter more judiciously than that, if he were in Willie’s weak condition. Willie is not strong enough yet for the daily repetition of such an irksome task ; and if you are not careful, the exertion of reading such frequent and such ‘ stupid ’ letters, will produce fever, and with no sister Eva to nurse him, I should tremble for the result.”

"Uncle John, you are perfectly absurd and provoking this morning!" she exclaimed, now thoroughly out of patience, and as much annoyed by Julia's quiet smile, and the peculiar expression of her father's face, as she was by Uncle John's words. "If it were anybody else, I should be really angry. This is the result of having spoiled you all my life. I have always submitted good-naturedly to your teasing, and now you are going to abuse the privilege."

"Which is always the lamentable result, my daughter," he answered, laughing, "of injudicious indulgence, whether of an unreasonable old man, or an unreasonable little child. But come, let us be friends again. The spoiled old man cannot afford to lose the good will of his indulgent young friend. Forgive me this time, Eva, and I will promise never again to say a word against any amount of sisterly affection that you may choose to bestow upon your brother Willie."

"Agreed. And now will you mail my letter?"

"No, Eva," he said, "for, all teasing and jesting aside, your letter cannot go to Willie now. Didn't I tell you just now that the railroad is torn up for fifteen miles?"

"And must we wait until it is repaired before we can even hear from our friends?"

"Yes; either until the road is repaired, or some other arrangement is made for transporting the mails."

"How long before the road will be repaired?"

"That, my daughter, I cannot tell. As we are beyond the Confederate lines, we will not of course do it ourselves, since we could not use it; and unless the Yankees occupy the place and put it in order for their own use, it will probably remain as it is for a long time, perhaps during the war."

"And so we are shut up," she exclaimed, in dismay. "Shut up alike from seeing our friends and from hearing from them. I declare this is intolerable!"

"This is war, my daughter, and it brings in its train many evils, so much more vexatious and annoying, that this seems as nothing in comparison. I am going now, Eva," he said, taking her hand. "Good-by! I have teased and worried you too much this morning, I confess, but the temptation was irresistible. I was obliged to do something to divert my thoughts from Yankee depredations."

"Humbug! nonsense!" exclaimed Eva, as she and Julia returned to the library after Uncle John had gone. "As if I couldn't tell whether or not my love for Willie was sisterly! Don't you believe that I could, sister?"

"I am very sure that I could, Eva," was the quiet reply.

"And so could anybody that would take the trouble to study their own feelings, even if they were doubtful. As to mine, they are too patent to everybody else, as well as to myself, to require any study. Anybody who understands me, and knows how readily I form attachments, and how ardent my feelings are, could at once comprehend my love for Willie."

"You have a very good test, Eva, if you choose to apply it, by which to judge your feelings. Walter is your brother, and just about Willie's age, and you have only to compare your love for the two plainly to understand the case."

Eva did not reply, but she thought: "I understand it already. However, sister, I will try your test, just to satisfy myself that I am right. The idea of two such children being lovers! A pretty pair we would make, with the combined age, wisdom, and experience of seventeen and twenty! The thought is absurd."

Eva had time enough during the next two weary weeks to study her feelings, and, however strongly she resisted the conviction, the truth gradually forced itself upon her that there was, after all, a shade of difference in the love that she felt for the two, a shade, however, which she accounted for in the difference of their conditions,—Walter being in high health and spirits, and needing neither tenderness nor sympathy, while Willie, an invalid among strangers, needed both. No letters had come from either, neither could she write any. She could not deny that the longing to hear from Willie was the more painful. "But it is natural," she argued, "that it should be so, for I am anxious about his health."

The appointed three weeks had more than passed away. Everything was quiet in Hopedale. There were no more rumors of threatened raids, and everybody believed that all the mischief that could be done had been accomplished, and that there was no more reason to apprehend another visit from the enemy. Still, Willie did not come, and Eva was restless and disturbed; but she thought that she succeeded in keeping it all to herself, assigning as a reason for her unwonted concealment, that Uncle John and sister did not understand her, and she was resolved hereafter to avoid everything that could confirm their foolish suspicions.

It was a bright December afternoon. The sun was pleasant, and there was no keen, biting winter wind. Eva was tired of the house; tired of reading, of sewing, of everything within doors. The bright sunshine tempted her, and she rang the bell, intending to order Dixie saddled, but before it was answered she changed her mind, and when the servant came, she said:

"Lucy, bring my cloak, hat, and gloves."

They were brought, and in a few moments she was sauntering

slowly down the lawn, with a very different gait from her usual bounding step. She had no special reason for going to the grove, whose leafless trees and carpet of dead, crisp leaves formed a painful contrast to the refreshing shade and beauty of its summer dress; but she was restless, and wanted to go somewhere, or do something, she cared not what, if she could only beguile her thoughts a little while from the one absorbing subject. But her thoughts went with her, and were busy with vain conjectures as to the cause of Willie's delay, and torturing fears lest he might not come at all. One moment she almost hoped that he would not attempt it, for she was afraid that the journey would injure him; the next, she thought of his recovery and return to the army, cut off from all communication with her for months, perhaps longer, and then she wanted him to come at any and all hazards. Bewildered and oppressed, having become daily more and more uncertain with regard to the nature of those feelings of which she had not long ago been so confident, not able to define them to herself, and not knowing exactly how she felt or what she wanted, she wandered on with a disturbed, anxious face, very different from its accustomed sunshine. She went far into the grove, still keeping the carriage-road, until she reached the old walnut-tree, whose leafless limbs now stretched like long gaunt arms over the road. The sight of the old tree, with its broad, flat stone underneath, and the broken remnants of decayed shells around, memorials of the happy nut-gatherings of other days, at once recalled Walter. For an instant, even Willie was forgotten. The innocent pleasures and the companion of her childhood rose before her; she remembered those happy days of careless mirth, and contrasted them painfully with her present disquiet and unrest, and the thought flashed across her with a pang:

"Will I, can I ever be a child again? Is the burden now upon my heart a sign, a pledge, that I can never more be the careless, happy child that I was not long ago, with no more anxiety than the butterfly or the bird? Ah, sister, it was no sacrifice for you to become a woman, for your very childhood was womanly; but for me, I dread womanhood, with its cares and responsibilities. I wish that I could always be the merry, light-hearted child that I was when Willie first came to the Hall: at least, I wish that the change could have been gradual; but I do not know how or when it has come. I only know that a few short months ago I was a child in heart and feeling; now, I must be a woman, for childhood surely never felt such anxiety as mine!"

If she heard, she did not heed the crackling sound of the crisp

leaves as they were crushed beneath a horse's slow, deliberate tread. The horseman looked with eager, scrutinizing gaze upon the girlish figure that seemed strangely out of place seated upon that cold stone, in a leafless grove, upon a winter's day. But he felt that he could not be mistaken. He knew who it was, although he did not see the face, and dismounting, slowly and with difficulty, he walked quietly along until he stood behind Eva.

She was not given to thoughtful moods, much less to reverie. These she had always considered the prerogative of womanhood, and therefore something with which she had no concern; but she was now quite as deeply absorbed as her more thoughtful sister had ever been. Willie waited in vain for a movement or a sign of recognition. If he had been one of the trees around her, she could not have seemed more unconscious of his presence; and at last, tired of waiting, he laid his hand gently upon her shoulder, and said:

"What are you thinking about, Eva?"

She could not have been more startled if a visitant from the other world had stood before her. She turned deadly pale, and from the tumult of feelings, in which surprise and pleasure, doubt and anxiety were all mingled, the excitable child found refuge, as she generally did, in a good hearty cry. It was not altogether a strange sight to Willie. Twice before he had seen her thus overcome, but then she had been much distressed; and seeing her here thus, alone at such a season, argued something unusual, and he was afraid something distressing. He took his seat beside her, and waited in silence until she should speak to him. She cried on until she was relieved, and then, wiping her eyes, and smiling brightly upon him, like the sunshine after a summer shower, she welcomed him gladly to the Hall again.

But he was not satisfied thus to ignore her unexplained tears, and so he said:

"Something troubles you, Eva; what is it?"

With a smile and a blush, she answered, evasively:

"No, Willie, I am not necessarily in trouble because I cry. I am only a silly child, whose tears are shallow, and always ready to overflow. But come," she added, wishing to change the subject, "you look tired. You must not stay here, you must go at once to the Hall, so mount your horse and ride on, and I will follow as quickly as I can."

"Yes, Eva, I am tired, but I am not going to the house yet. Sit down again," he added, drawing her gently back, "for you are not going either. I am too glad to find you alone, and whatever may be the result, my suspense, at least, will be relieved before we leave this spot. You have told me more than once, Eva,

that you regarded me as a brother, that Walter and I were side by side in your heart. Once or twice a remonstrance trembled upon my lips, but I checked it. Your words were positive; they could not be misunderstood, and I have no right to think either that you were yourself deceived or meant to deceive me. I accepted the brother's place, at least I tried to do so; but, Eva, it would not do, and I have come back now to tell you that it does not, it will not, it cannot satisfy me. Oh, Eva! recall that one word, take back that sister's love. I would rather have none than that. If you do not love me at all, perhaps my great love for you will after awhile awaken a response; but if you have already given me a sister's affection, I know that I can never have any other. Speak to me, Eva; tell me something."

She looked as if she were about to resort to her usual relief of tears, but she controlled herself, and a deep blush overspread her face and neck as she answered, in a low voice:

"I was mistaken, Willie. I have found it out since you went away. It is no sister's love that I have for you."

"Now, God bless you for that, my darling!" he said, as he clasped her face in his hands and pressed a kiss upon her forehead. "God bless you for that one word!"

"Oh, Willie!" she exclaimed, blushing crimson, and releasing herself from his grasp, "that would be dreadful if we were anything but children."

"If this be one of the privileges of childhood, Eva," he answered, smiling, "we shall always be children, and you must not think me a very unreasonable one if I tell you that I am not yet satisfied. I cannot be contented only to know that you are not my sister; I must also know when you will be my wife."

"You and papa and sister must settle that, Willie," she answered, with her old merry laugh. "I know nothing about such things. But I don't think that it will be very soon, for papa looks upon me as nothing but a child, and I am sure that he will want you to wait until I become a woman."

"We are both little more than children, Eva; but that need not separate us. We will only grow older and wiser all the better, if we can do so together. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, Willie, I agree with you; but I am afraid that papa will think differently. Suppose that we agree to abide cheerfully by his decision, like obedient children; will you, Willie?"

"Yes, Eva, I will try."

"Come now, you must go. You look tired enough to faint. Ride as fast as you can, and go straight into the library. Your sofa is ready for you, and my little chair is in the same old place."

"I would much rather walk with you, Eva; but that is out of the question, for I am now so tired that I can scarcely stand."

"Well, then, get on your horse quickly, and be off."

As he mounted slowly, and started off in a walk, she said, laughing:

"If you go at that gait, Willie, you will find me seated in my little chair when you get there."

"I cannot ride any faster, Eva," he said. "This has been my gait all the way. The jolting is painful."

She had intended to run on before and announce his arrival; but when he said this, and she saw how exhausted he looked, and how evidently he was suffering, she walked along quietly and anxiously by his side, fearing lest, after all, he might not be able to reach the house. It was with great relief that she saw him at last in the lawn; and then darting forward, and skimming the ground like a bird, she ran to the house, calling aloud:

"Oh, papa! oh, sister! Willie has come! Willie has come!"

Thus summoned, Mr. Cameron and Julia hastened to the door, where they stood several minutes waiting for him. Mr. Cameron assisted him to dismount, and supported him into the library; where Eva had already wheeled the sofa near the fire, and brought pillows and blankets to make him comfortable. She placed her little chair beside him, and, seating herself, said:

"Now, Willie, you are at home again. This seems like old times."

He took her hand, and answered, softly:

"Better than old times, Eva. I am not Walter now, and I am happy! You must all entertain me to-night," he said. "I am too tired to talk, but just tired enough to listen."

That night, when Julia was almost ready for bed, Eva stole softly into her room, and said, in a low voice:

"Sister, may I talk to you a little while?"

"Yes, child," Julia answered, knowing well what was coming.

"I have found out something, sister," she said, blushing. "I have found out that I don't love Willie as I do Walter."

"And I found that out long ago, Eva."

"Then why didn't you tell me so, sister?"

"I intimated once, you recollect, that such a thing was possible; but you repelled the thought so indignantly, that I could do nothing but leave you to find it out for yourself, which I knew that sooner or later you must do. I have suspected for several days past that the truth was beginning to dawn upon you."

"No, sister, the truth never dawned, it flashed upon me. I only began to find out that Willie did not occupy Walter's place

in my heart. What he really was to me, I never knew until this evening, when he asked me to be his wife, and my heart responded so fully and unreservedly, that I knew it must be a wife's love that I had for him; and so I promised."

"What does papa say, Eva?"

"I have not told him yet. Willie is to do that in the morning; but there is but one answer that he can give. There is, there can be no objection against my Willie!"

"Happy, confiding child!" thought Julia. "May you never awaken from your sweet dream of bliss!—Eva," she said, "do you not think that this was a grave and important step to take without consulting papa?"

"It might have been with anybody else, sister; but it could not be with Willie. Papa will not, cannot object; you will see it."

"But just suppose that he should. What then?"

"I never trouble myself about possibilities. I am very sure that papa will think it all right. Willie and I belong to each other now, and nobody can separate us."

"You certainly, Eva, would not marry him without papa's consent!"

"No—never, sister! Papa can, and if he sees fit he will, prevent our being married, but I do not believe that he will; but neither papa nor any other human being could prevent our loving each other. We cannot ourselves control that now. I do not expect papa to consent to our immediate marriage, and I have told Willie so, and we have agreed to be obedient children and await his time; but of the final result we have neither of us any doubt. If we live we shall go through life together."

"God grant you, Eva, the realization of your dream! It is a happiness which He sees best to deny to some hearts. Some, as warm and loving, and as closely bound together as yours and Willie's, He sometimes sunders by an insurmountable barrier."

"Such will not be our fate, I am sure," answered Eva, cheerfully. "Willie and I are going to be happy, very happy, sister, and won't you be glad?"

"Very glad, my darling. Should God see best to make all your life as bright and happy as it has been in your childhood's home, none would rejoice more than your sister. But, Eva, you must not certainly expect it to be so. God, like our earthly father, finds it necessary sometimes to mingle chastening with happiness; the cloud and the rain are as needful as the sunshine, to perfect the flower."

Eva kissed her sister, and with a light, buoyant heart went off to her pleasant sleep and happy dreams; while the troubled Julia

tossed and groaned through the live-long night, as she thought of the happiness of her child-sister, and tried to gain her own consent to cloud that sunshine, and to send a pang through that young heart. It was the most painful struggle of her life. She had unhesitatingly sacrificed her own happiness, but she could not so readily blight her sister's. However, Julia was accustomed to delay only until she was convinced of the right; and when she arose in the morning from her sleepless bed, it was with an unfaltering purpose to do what she conceived to be her duty.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning, Mr. Cameron received a message from Willie, saying that he was not able to get up to breakfast, and requesting him to come to his room at his earliest convenience.

With boyish frankness and simplicity he told his story, and quietly awaited the response, whose purport, as Eva had told her sister, his unsuspecting heart had never doubted. Mr. Cameron was not so much surprised by his declaration as Willie had expected; for his experienced eye, like Julia's, had seen it long ago. He took Willie's hand cordially, as he replied:

"I have but one objection, my son. You are both altogether too young. As to Eva, she is nothing but a child; Willie. You know that as well as I do."

"It is true, sir," he answered modestly, "that we are both very young and without experience. We have that yet to learn; but may we not do it as well together as apart? I have heard something, too, Mr. Cameron, of an assimilating process being necessary between newly-married people, and that during that process there are many clashing feelings which produce an occasional jar, or sometimes even a perpetual heartache. Now, might we not be spared much of this, by beginning life together so young, and having our characters and tempers moulded by the same circumstances and interests; and would there not be sooner produced that oneness which makes the happiness of married life, and which is sometimes purchased, by people who marry later, at the cost of many a pang?"

Mr. Cameron smiled, as he replied:

"Your argument is a strong one, Willie, and I have nothing wherewith to refute it; and so all that I can do is to see if there

is another, specially belonging to the present case, which may outweigh it. In other times and under other circumstances, I should perhaps yield to your entreaty without resistance; but just now, you must yourself acknowledge that I have good grounds for hesitating. Suppose now that I should give you your child-wife, what would you do with her? As soon as you are sufficiently recovered, you will go back into the army, where I trust and believe that you intend to stay, if your life is spared, until this war is over. Meanwhile, what is to become of her? You will not be willing to leave her here, outside the lines, where you cannot hear from her; and if you take her away, you take the child from home, father, and sister, and, unable to take care of her yourself, she is left to the care of strangers. Think of her, Willie, among strangers. You yourself know how unhappy she would be."

"I should never, Mr. Cameron, leave Eva among strangers. She should never leave you without your consent; and then I should only take her from one home to another. She should go to my home in Alabama, where she would find another father, and I would give her, too, what unfortunately she has never known, a mother."

He paused for an answer, but none came, and in a tone of uneasiness he continued:

"I know that I am asking a great deal, Mr. Cameron, when I ask you to give me that child, as you call her, the light of your heart and of your home. My own great love for her, and the painful consciousness that she is now indispensable to my happiness, can enable me to know better than anybody else what it is that I am asking of her father. All that I can do, sir, is to assure you from the depths of an honest heart that her happiness shall not suffer in the transfer. To make her happy, as happy as she has been in her father's home, shall be the business of my life, as to love her shall be its pleasure."

"I believe it, Willie. It is not a doubt of this that makes me hesitate; nor is it a selfish unwillingness to give her up. However dependent I may be upon her for happiness, I know that I have no right to sacrifice hers to mine; but yet as her father, Willie, it is my duty to use my superior age and experience in guarding it, and not, for fear of making two young people temporarily uncomfortable, to jeopardize the happiness of both. I am afraid, my son, that you will have to be satisfied at present with the grant of only a portion of your request. I will promise to give the child to you, but not just now. Let her father take care of her until her husband can. Will that do?"

"Thank you, sir, more than I can express," he answered, with

his blue eyes full of tears. "It is more than I had a right to expect, though not quite all that I asked. She told me that she did not think you would consent to our immediate marriage, and asked me to agree that we would, like obedient children, cheerfully await her father's time. I promised to do it, and I mean to try, Mr. Cameron, however great the self-denial may be."

"God bless the child!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron, earnestly, "that is just like her. Willie, she deserves all the happiness at your hands that you can give her; and if you will let her, she will be your sunbeam as she has been mine. No man knows," he added, thoughtfully and sadly, "no man can know what he is doing, when he asks a father for a daughter, especially for such as mine. God help my lonely old age, when I shall have given them both up!"

There was a pause of a few moments, and then Willie said:

"I trust, Mr. Cameron, that you do not think that in urging our immediate marriage, I am thinking only of myself and my own happiness. No, sir, I love her far too well for that; but I honestly believe that hers, as well as mine, would be most promoted by it. We are married in heart and soul now, sir, just as much as we will be when Mr. Derby shall have pronounced us man and wife. We could not be more anxious about each other then than we shall be now; the separation will be just as painful now as it could be after we were married: but if we actually belonged to each other in the eyes of men as well as of God, there would be a certain feeling of security, of possession, of safety against accident or peradventure, that would go far toward sustaining both. We might not doubt each other; we might and would have an abiding, implicit faith in the truthfulness and constancy of each other; and yet, sir, in the thought that Eva was my own wife, that nothing but death could separate us, there would be a supporting power which, it seems to me, that you, having once been a young husband yourself, ought to understand and appreciate."

"And so I do, my son. I both understand your feelings, and sympathize with them, for I am not yet so old as to have forgotten what it is to be young and ardent. But since I have been both old and young, and have had the ardor of one tempered by the experience of the other, I have the advantage over you. You are perfectly honest and sincere in what you say, and you really believe that, with Eva as your wife instead of your betrothed, you will not only be a happier, but likewise a more efficient soldier. Is it not so?"

"I don't only believe it, sir, I know it."

"Now listen to the voice of experience, Willie. So far from

being a spur to your energies, she will only clog them; so far from nerving your arm, she will paralyze it."

"Never, Mr. Cameron, never, sir!" exclaimed Willie.

"Hear me, my son. You have heard of responsibility; but as yet you know nothing of it but the name. Now, the moment that you marry Eva, you will assume a responsibility of whose weight you little dream, and whose burden you can never more shake off. It matters not that you still leave her with her father to be taken care of; it matters not that you may be satisfied that he will do it as well, perhaps better than you could yourself. You have constituted yourself her protector; you have virtually taken it out of her father's hands, and you will and must feel, as long as she lives, that the responsibility of her happiness, of her protection, rests upon you. Heretofore you have been free. Ties you had at home, but no responsibilities, and your thoughts and attention were given to your duties as a soldier. Your heart was unburdened; and there is no such nerve to an arm as a light heart. But hereafter you would be hampered and fettered. Anxiety for your wife would cloud your judgment and dim your perceptions; and unless you were more of a man and a patriot than most of our sex, more governed by that conscientious motive which never allows feeling to affect the performance of duty, you would find your interest slacken and your energies fail."

Willie shook his head, and Mr. Cameron said, smiling:

"It is true, my son, although you cannot see it. However, I will not quarrel with you for not seeing things through my spectacles, especially in the present case. You have agreed to yield to my decision, and it would be unreasonable to ask more."

"I am afraid you will think that I am the unreasonable one, Mr. Cameron, to have asked so much of you; but boys, you know, are proverbial for large demands, and impatient for immediate gratification."

"Yes, my son, and men are soon taught, by the discipline of life, that immediate gratification is the exception, and not the rule; that desire and enjoyment are most frequently separated by a wide interval of toil and anxiety.—But you plunged so suddenly into your business when I came in, that you did not even give me time to ask if you are better this morning."

"I am sure, sir, that I am no worse, though still exceedingly tired. I thought that a little indulgence, this morning, might be pardoned, and think that I already feel better for the rest. I shall get up now, however, and go down stairs. Where is Eva? I have not even heard her voice this morning, and that is unnatural."

"We are becoming somewhat accustomed to that now, Willie;

though at first it seemed, indeed, most singular to see her moving about the house almost as quietly as her sister; but she has done it ever since you went away. I suspected from the first that you had something to do with it, and I did not think it quite so much a matter of course either, as she did, that your departure should have so distressed her. When I came up stairs just now, she was at the pit searching for flowers to deck your table this winter's day. She has not forgotten that Willie loves flowers."

Julia shrank with an aching heart from the trial that was before her; but as soon as she had seen her father go up to Willie's room, she called Eva away from the pit into the library.

"Sit down here, child," she said, "and listen to me. I have something to say to you."

Eva saw the pain expressed in her sister's face, and cried out, in alarm:

"Oh, sister! what is the matter? Is Willie worse?"

"No, Eva, Willie is better; but I have something to say to you about him."

She paused a moment, for her lip quivered and her voice faltered; but presently she went on.

"Eva, you know that George has disgraced not only himself, but father and sisters as well. You must remember that George is your brother."

"Well, sister!" she replied, in astonishment and simplicity, "what has that to do with Willie?"

"Perhaps, child," said Julia, gently, "if Willie knew it, he would not be willing to marry George's sister. You must tell him, Eva."

The child was astonished. She sat a few moments, as if she had been stunned; and then, hiding her face in her sister's lap, she cried out in a voice of agony that went to Julia's very heart:

"Oh, sister, that is not my fault! I am not to blame for what George has done. Why, oh why must it blight my happiness?"

Julia tried to explain, what was so clear to herself, that the family name must be affected by the conduct of every individual member of it; but Eva could not understand it. All that she could then know or feel was, that she and Willie might after all be separated; and when once that dreary thought took possession of her mind, and she fully realized it, Julia was obliged to stop talking altogether, for her sobbing sister could neither hear nor understand any more. After a long time, she sprang up suddenly, and exclaimed with energy:

"I don't believe that Willie will care about George at all! He is too just to blame me for George's conduct!"

"I trust so, darling," answered her sister; "but Willie must

know it, Eva. It would not be dealing fairly and honestly with him to marry him without telling him. You will do it, won't you?"

"Oh no, sister!" she answered, shrinking. "I cannot tell him. I am perfectly willing for him to know it, for I would not deceive him; but I cannot tell him myself. I cannot tell Willie," she added, with a shudder, "that my name is disgraced. Oh no, sister, anything but that!"

Julia groaned involuntarily, as she looked at her, and answered:

"You can do it better than anybody else, Eva. Besides, it is your duty."

"Oh, sister, please don't tell me that. I would rather do anything else in the world!"

"Yes, Eva, I believe that you would. Duty is often very hard; and I admit that it is particularly so in this case. Nevertheless, you ought to do it, and the sooner the better."

This was about as much as Julia generally found it necessary to say to her sister; so she kissed her now and went away, leaving her to think about her duty, and make up her mind to its performance. Eva sat a long time in a dreamy state, scarcely conscious of anything except a leaden weight upon her heart; and she was at last aroused by the sound of her father's step coming down stairs, and, fearing lest Willie might be with him, she hastily escaped to her own room.

When Willie came down into the library it was empty, but he found that careful hands had provided for his comfort. The sofa was near the fire, and the little chair was in its accustomed place beside it.

As he glanced around the room, with its familiar furniture and home-like aspect, he thought:

"How many happy hours I have spent here; and yet they are all but a foretaste of the happiness that awaits me, with my sweet child-wife! How can I be thankful enough for such a gift! God help me to show my gratitude for the blessing, by the care with which I guard it!"

Eva did not come; and at last, tired of waiting, he rang the bell, and sent Lucy for her.

She soon came, with a sad face, and tear-stained cheeks, and laggard step.

Willie was both amazed and distressed.

"Come here, Eva," he said, "and sit down in your little chair. But first arrange my pillows. They are never comfortable until you have had something to do with them."

She did as she was requested, and then seated herself in silence. Willie drew her face down to kiss her, saying, with a smile:

"You know that 'we are nothing but children.' Besides, papa has just given you to me. You belong to me, now."

She drew back, and replied, with a burst of tears:

"No, Willie, not now."

"Eva," he exclaimed, anxiously, "what is the matter? What does this—what can this mean?"

As soon as she could speak, she told him, simply and in a few words. When she had finished, he said, taking her hand:

"Eva, you are not George; neither are you responsible for his conduct. He has done enough wrong already; he must not and shall not interfere with our happiness. You belong to me still."

She looked up at him with a bright, glad smile through her tears. He kissed her, and said:

"You are mine, Eva, my own. Your father says so, and neither George nor any other human being shall take you from me. And now listen, we are neither of us ever to speak or think of George again while we live. Do you hear?"

"I am sure that I am very willing, Willie. The truth is, that I should neither have thought nor spoken of him now, if sister had not told me that it was my duty. She said that it would be wrong to marry you under a deception."

"And so it would, Eva; but your sister did me injustice when she thought that it could affect my feelings toward you."

"She did not say that it would, Willie, but only that perhaps it might. Are you sure," she added, with a slight hesitation, and with an expression of pain, "very sure, that you will love, will respect me just as much as you did before? For if not, Willie, I cannot——"

"Yes, you dear, little, silly child," he answered, laughing, and pushing back her disordered curls from her face. "I am 'sure, very sure, that I will love, will respect you just as much,' and, if possible, a little more than I did before. Are you satisfied now?"

"Perfectly satisfied," she answered, with a sigh of relief, "and," she added, with a smile, "perfectly happy, too, Willie. And now tell me, what did papa say?"

"Just what you said he would; that our age was his only objection. He has given you to me, but I must wait a little while to have you in possession. It will be hard to wait, Eva, will it not?"

"Yes, Willie, very hard for me. Sister could, if she were in my place, wait so patiently that nobody would suspect that she ever wished it otherwise; but I cannot. I shall be very miserable when you are gone. It was hard enough," she added, with a smile, "to give you up when you were only my brother; and,

now that you are so much more, I don't know how I can do it at all."

"And how do you think that I will bear to be separated from you? You can have no conception of the weariness of those weeks that I have been away from you. For awhile your daily letter kept me up, but when that ceased, it was intolerable indeed. And, besides, I did not feel then that I had any right even to wish for you, for you did not belong to me, neither had I reason to hope that you ever would; but now that you do, now that I have a better right to you than anybody else, I do not know how I will bear it at all. As to going back to the army, that seems, indeed, in the distant future. I thought that when my wound began really to heal, and I could see it grow better from week to week, that I should soon be myself again; but I am still strangely weak, much more so even than I imagined, until I undertook to come here on horseback. Hard, active service in the army, with employment for mind and body, might perhaps render the separation tolerable; but as this is impossible for some time to come, and as it will not be prudent to stay here, I would like to take you as my wife to my own home, and let you take care of me until I shall be able to rejoin my regiment. How would you like this, Eva?"

"Very much, Willie. Indeed, I would rather go anywhere with you than to stay without you; but it is not right for us to be indulging any such idle wishes. Sister would think that we were both unreasonable and ungrateful, and ought to be satisfied with papa's permission to love each other now, and his promise that we shall one day belong to each other."

"And your sister would be right, Eva," he answered. "It is both unreasonable and ungrateful, and not only so, but it is inconsistent with that life of Christian submission and obedience on which I am about to enter. God helping me, Eva, I will do so no more; I will wait patiently for you." He was silent a little while, and then said: "Eva, when may I see Mr. Derby? Can you not send for him to come out this afternoon? He must baptize me to-morrow, if he thinks that I am fit."

"You will not be strong enough to go to town to-morrow, Willie."

"Yes, if you will send me in the carriage. We must not delay it, Eva. Remember how I was hurried off before."

"I will go and send for Mr. Derby at once, if you say so."

"Yes, if you please."

She went out and sent the messenger, and when she came back and seated herself, Willie took her hand and said, seriously:

"I have been very lonely, as I told you, Eva, since I left you;

but I have not been idle, and I trust that my time has been profitably spent. I have studied the prayer-book much, especially the baptismal office. I like that word 'soldier' as it is used there. It is full of meaning to one who knows from experience what the soldier's life is. To do duty even when most disagreeable; to obey orders when you don't understand them; to bear privation without complaint, and toil with cheerful submission; to shoulder the musket and march when most you long to rest; to watch when you are most weary; to fight when you are ready to faint;—I think, Eva, that I have learned somewhat of my duty as Christ's soldier by being a soldier to my country. But this is not all. Hardship, privation, and toil only sweeten rest, and the soldier who has fought is best prepared to mingle in the shout of victory. I have thought many times of my glad exultation on the day of Manassas, when I heard the cry of victory. How my heart swelled and bounded and throbbed, even when I lay mangled and bleeding upon the ground, and thought that my life was fast ebbing away with my blood! And if an earthly soldier can feel such exultation in one single victory that he has helped to win, when perhaps he must needs fight his battle right over again, what must be the feelings of the Christian soldier, whose battles are all fought, whose victories are all won, and who lays aside his sword and his armor to enjoy forever the peace for which he has fought! Yes, Eva," he added, thoughtfully, "I believe that I know now what it means to be Christ's *soldier*!" After a slight pause, he added: "Do you know, Eva, that I expect you to help me much in the Christian life?"

"Oh, no!" she said, shrinkingly, "don't expect that, Willie. You will help me, but, indeed, I cannot help you. Sister could, but I cannot."

"Yes, Eva, you can, and you will. You will both encourage and influence me for good."

"I will try my best, Willie; but you must not expect much from me. Sometimes I am afraid that I am no Christian at all, for I cannot be like sister, no matter how much I try."

"Of course you cannot, Eva, for God did not make you alike. Your dispositions and temperaments are altogether different, and these, religion cannot alter. Its moral principles are the same, and it must control all characters, but it does not eradicate our individual nature and make us all alike. St. Peter and St. John were both Christian men, and surely no two ever lived who were more entirely dissimilar. I think that there is quite as much individuality in the religion of people as there is in their faces, and you must not think that because you are unlike your sister you are therefore not so sincere a Christian."

"Sincere I believe that I am, Willie, but that is all that I can say for myself; but sister is the most conscientious person that I ever saw. If she is once convinced that anything is right, and is her duty, she never asks herself if she wants to do it, but she goes quietly and steadily forward until it is done."

"I believe and am willing to acknowledge all that. I do not wish to depreciate your sister, for I should be incapable of admiring what is excellent, and also most ungrateful, if I did not love and respect her. But what I insist upon is, that you shall not depreciate yourself, and shall not think that you cannot be a Christian because you are not like your sister. What is it in yourself that you find fault with?"

"My thoughtlessness and light-heartedness, Willie. Surely, if I realized as I ought, what people call the responsibilities of life, I would be less of a child and more of a woman. And yet, to tell you the truth, I do not want to be a woman, nor do I want to feel life's responsibilities. I want to put them off just as long as possible. I have never felt any more care or anxiety than the birds, and I wish that I never could! I love childhood, with its freedom from care, its light heart, its sunshine, its happiness. Now I am getting too old for this. I am approaching womanhood,—indeed, since I have promised to be a wife I ought to have already become a woman,—and it must be unreasonable, and perhaps unchristian for me still to cling so to childhood, still to dread and to shrink from that burden which I know that I, as well as others, must bear."

"It is not unreasonable, it is not unchristian, Eva," said Willie, warmly. "While God gives you sunshine, enjoy it; while He sees best not to burden you with care, do not seek to burden yourself. Wait His time. Your Christian obedience and submission will show themselves by accepting the burden and the responsibility when His hand lays them upon you, and until then, enjoy your freedom, and thank Him for it. And as to your loving childhood and clinging to it, I wish that you always would. Always keep the same childlike spirit and temper that you have now, and especially preserve it in your religion. Let the religion of your whole life be that of childhood,—trustful, loving, docile, obedient, and it must be acceptable in the eyes of Him who has Himself given a little child as the most beautiful exemplification of Christian character."

"Good scriptural doctrine, Willie!" said Mr. Derby, coming in. "You and Eva seem to preach to each other by turns, and I always happen to come in too late for anything but the conclusion. I am glad to see you back again," he added, shaking his hand, "but sorry to find you still on the sofa."

"Yes, sir, still here. I can bear it with tolerable fortitude in this place and in this company" (with a glance at Eva), "but anywhere else, I assure you, sir, that my slow recovery is a sore trial of patience. But you must have come very rapidly, or else the time has passed very pleasantly. It seems to me but a very short time since Eva sent for you."

"And so it is. The messenger met me on the road, coming not to see you, for I did not know that you were here, but to look after my young parishioners. That one sitting beside you there has been sorely in need of pastoral care of late. In the first place, she has been in trouble; and although as I did not know the cause, I could not administer the comfort that she specially needed, yet there are general promises and general comforts, alike applicable to all cases, which the minister may offer, and frequently with soothing effect. And not only has she needed consolation of late, but reproof as well. She has been a naughty girl, Willie, and has said some very hard things, and made some very wrong wishes about the Yankee Vandals, as she calls them."

"That is true, Willie," she said. "I had not come to that part of my confession; but I had not forgotten it. I intended to tell you all the wrong about myself, and I am afraid that when I had finished you would agree with me that, whatever helpmate I might be in other respects, in your religious life I would be only a clog and a burden."

"Clog and burden you can never be, Eva! Do you know, Mr. Derby, that this young parishioner of yours has been given to me, and that I have built large hopes of improvement in temper and character upon the influence and example of my wife?"

"Oh, Willie!" she exclaimed, blushing to her temples, "you must not talk so to Mr. Derby. He knows me too well. I never feel so wicked as when somebody calls me a Christian, and I never realize so painfully that I ought to be something besides the child that I am, as when you remind me that I am to be your wife."

"Never mind, Eva, I am satisfied with you just as you are, and that is sufficient; is it not, Mr. Derby?"

"Yes, Willie, if you are satisfied, nobody else has a right to complain, and nobody will, until you take the child away, and then there will be a general rebellion."

"I am afraid, sir, that you will not rebel for a long time. I am not to take her yet. Her father says that I must wait."

"And he is right, my son. He can take care of her, while you cannot."

"It is right, Mr. Derby, but it is hard. If I had her with me,

my present exile from duty, from home, and from the Hall, would be tolerable. As it is, it is almost martyrdom."

"Have you not met with kindness since you left us, Willie?"

"Kindness, sir! I have met with nothing else; but I want society, *her* society. Perhaps I would have borne it better if I had been farther from the Hall. You know that it is more tolerable to have pleasures entirely beyond our reach, than to have them almost within our grasp, and yet be unable to catch them. Sometimes I used to feel sorry that I had ever seen Cameron Hall."

"How do you feel about that now?" asked Mr. Derby, glancing at Eva.

"Thankful, sir, for the wound that nearly cost me my life; thankful for the accident that sent me to Hopedale; and thankful beyond all expression for my stay here. Eva and I expect to be grateful for this as long as we live; is it not so, Eva?"

"I am sure that I shall be, Willie, and I hope that you will be also. I shall try very hard to be all that you expect; but I am afraid that you are risking much when you place your happiness in my keeping. The truth is that I have everything to learn. I have been myself taken care of all my life, and have never known what it is to feel that anybody was dependent upon me for anything."

"And you are still to be taken care of, Eva, just as much as ever; and if you have, as you say, everything to learn, I know that you will be an apt scholar. Mr. Derby, you must promise now, to come and visit us, when peace comes and we have our own home, and you shall see for yourself what a model wife your parishioner will make."

"I hope by that time," she said, laughing, "to have taken some lessons from sister in cooking, for at present I have about as much idea of it as Walter. I must read you his letter, Willie, giving his experience in that line, and let you see what splendid cooks Cameron Hall can send out into the world, and what is in store for you in future, while I shall be learning."

She then leaned over, and whispered:

"I will go now, and leave you to talk to Mr. Derby. When you want me again, send for me."

As she closed the door, the minister said:

"Happy child! May her heart never know a cloud! No, that is not the best wish for her either. May she only know such as may prepare her for the unclouded sunshine of heaven!"

"I will try hard, sir," said Willie, "to make her happy."

"You must, my son. Should her life be dark, see to it that you do not help to make it so."

"I will, Mr. Derby," he answered, earnestly. "It shall be my business to share with her the burden of life. Do you know, sir," he added, "that I shrink, just as much as she does, from the thought of burden and responsibility being laid upon her? The idea is unnatural. Of all the beings that I ever saw, she is most associated with sunshine, and whenever I think of her, it is as if a ray of light had suddenly shot across my heart. She was not made to bear trouble and sorrow."

"That may be, Willie; but you must yourself take hold of the truth that you were urging upon her when I came in. God is pledged to put no heavier burden upon her than she requires, and than He will help her to bear; and until He sees best to do it, you as well as she ought to rejoice in the brightness of her young life, and anticipate for her nothing else. Let the future alone; God will take care of that."

In his conversation with Willie about his baptism, Mr. Derby had nothing new either to hear or to advise. They had talked long and often upon the subject, and he would not have hesitated long before to administer the rite of which Willie was afraid that he was unworthy.

"Eva," he said, "thinks that, in my present condition, it would be right to be baptized here, and that you would not object to it; but as it is possible for me to go to church, I prefer to do it."

"That is right. It seems a small matter; but even in things seemingly insignificant, I would prefer to follow the church's guidance. The sacraments belong to God's house, and while provision is made to administer them elsewhere, when need requires, still, when it is practicable, the church is the proper place. I will meet you there, if you say so, to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock."

"Very well, sir. My conscience will be greatly relieved when it is done, for I have had many sharp upbraidings since I went away for having gone without it."

"I too have regretted it much, Willie; and have been afraid that perhaps I did not do my whole duty. I have sometimes thought that if I had been more faithful in teaching and urging, you would have yielded long ago."

"A most unnecessary self-reproach, I assure you, sir. If you had not done your duty so faithfully, the probability is that I would not have seen mine at all. May God help me to be as faithful in doing, as you have been in teaching!"

After a little while, Mr. Derby said:

"I suppose, Willie, that some of these days you will want me to perform another service for you,—one in which Eva will not be a witness, but a participator."

"Yes, sir; and I wish that I thought it would be very soon."

"So do I, Willie, for your sakes. I will officiate next time all the more cheerfully from having done so now. I can the more readily give Eva into your keeping; but I should not be willing to give her to any but a Christian man. With her disposition, so loving, so trusting, so yielding, the influence of any other might seriously injure her Christian character."

"May I come in?" asked Eva, opening the door and putting her head in.

"Yes, come," said Willie. "You need not have gone at first, for Mr. Derby and I had nothing to say that you might not have heard."

"Eva, where is Julia?" asked the minister.

"She is making something nice for Willie's dinner, Mr. Derby. I went out to help her just now, but I think that she could have dispensed with my assistance. My thoughts were in the library instead of the pantry, and I broke too many eggs, and did not weigh enough sugar, and made mistakes generally, until at last she sent me away. Indeed, Willie, I am sorry for you; you have chosen such a useless child."

"Don't waste your sympathy, Eva. I am satisfied."

"I suppose, children," said Mr. Derby, "that you are surprised that I should have expressed no astonishment at what you have told me."

"Yes, sir," replied Eva, "you take it very quietly; just as if it was nothing new."

"Nor is it, my daughter. I saw it three months ago."

"Oh, no, Mr. Derby, not so long ago as that! Even Willie did not know it then!"

"That may be; but, nevertheless, I saw plainly enough what was coming. And as to yourself, Eva, you are altogether too transparent for concealment."

"I have never tried it, Mr. Derby, because I had nothing that I wanted to hide. I did not suspect the nature of my feelings toward Willie; perhaps if I had, I would have tried to conceal them, as I shall do now."

"A most successful beginning you have made, Eva," replied the minister, laughing. "Why, child, I saw how matters stood the very instant that I came into the room."

"Of course you did, because I intended that you should; but I do not mean that all the world shall know that Willie and I are going to be married. I will try to keep my secret, though I am afraid that I cannot, for Uncle John always declared that to tell me a secret was just like publishing it."

"And why try to make a secret of our engagement, Eva?"

asked Willie. "If we were married, we would not object to its being known; why try to hide the fact that one day we intend to be? This mystery and secrecy about engagements were always incomprehensible to me."

"It is only because that, under such circumstances, persons are always talked about, and this is disagreeable, especially to a lady."

"Well, Eva, it may be that you ladies have different notions and feelings on this subject from our less shrinking sex; but if I know myself, I would have no objection for the whole world to know this minute that I intended to marry you."

"To tell the truth, Willie," she answered, laughing, "I feel so too; and yet I am afraid that this is not a proper feeling. I hope that I am not unwomanly, above all, I trust that I am not wanting in maidenly reserve; but yet I do not feel that I should be distressed, or even greatly annoyed, if our engagement should be known. Of course I do not expect to publish it, nor on the other hand can I deny it."

"That is right, my daughter," said Mr. Derby, "and your frankness and truthfulness are neither unwomanly nor unmaidenly."

The day passed off pleasantly; and in the afternoon Uncle John came. He announced his arrival, as he generally did, by walking into the library, where he found the whole circle. He looked troubled and anxious; but his eye brightened with pleasure as he comprehended at a glance the happiness of the two young hearts. Eva sprang up to meet him, and he whispered:

"So, your brother has come back, Eva!"

"Not my brother now, Uncle John. Something more than that!"

"Oh, ho! I thought so, my daughter."

He then congratulated Willie on his return to his sister.

Willie looked perplexed, and said he did not understand, and Uncle John replied:

"You must know that this curly-headed damsel here, not three weeks ago, was really fretted and worried——"

"Now, Uncle John," interrupted Eva, "be careful—don't exaggerate."

"I repeat," said Uncle John, "she was really fretted and worried, if not positively angry with me, for being in the slightest degree incredulous, when she told me that she loved Willie with a sister's love, the same in kind and almost in degree that she felt for Walter."

"She was sincere, sir, for she told me the same; and unfortunately for my comfort, I was not so incredulous as you were. I

am happy to find, however, that she was mistaken, for that sister's love with which she promised to favor me has kept me very unhappy since I left her. I always thought that when a man offered a woman his heart, with all its strong, deep feelings, and asked hers in return, there could be no more refined cruelty than to offer him, in place of what he asked, cold friendship or a sister's love. He asked bread, and she gave him a stone!"

A pang shot through Julia's heart, as she thought:

"It was not what I felt, but it was what I offered in return for a love as deep and fervent as was ever given a woman. It was what I sent him away with, and what he has had to be contented with ever since—if, indeed, he has not finally succeeded in overcoming a passion which seemingly met with so poor a requital."

"Well, Willie," said Uncle John, "I am glad that your affection has met with a more satisfactory return than the sister's love which was at first offered. I am both glad and sorry to see you children so happy."

"Why, Uncle John?" exclaimed several voices.

"Because the pleasure must be short-lived. There is another rumor in town of an approaching raiding-party; and from what I can hear, it seems reliable."

"I scarcely think it can be, sir," said Mr. Derby, "for there is no temptation to visit us again in this vicinity. The neighboring country is already pretty well devastated."

"The rumor may not be true," replied Uncle John; "but so we all thought before, and if I were in Willie's place, daylight to-morrow morning would not find me here."

"Oh, Uncle John!" exclaimed Eva, "he cannot go. He has not been able even to sit up to-day."

"Very well, my daughter, he must decide for himself."

"Of course, I must go, Eva," said Willie. "You would not have me stay? Don't, Eva, please don't," he whispered, as he saw the storm coming; "wait until to-morrow, when I shall be gone."

"I must go away for a little while, Willie," she said, attempting to rise; "I will come back again presently."

"No," he answered, laying his hand upon her to detain her, "you must not go. You must stay by me as long as I am here, and try and be your own bright self. Won't you?"

"I will try," she answered, choking back her tears, and seating herself again.

Uncle John was now kept busy answering questions, which were rapidly asked by one and another; but as is usual in such cases, he had little satisfactory information to give.

"Uncle John," said Willie, "do you think that I ought to go

away at once, or might I safely stay until morning? If I could, I should like to do so very much, for I am still so tired from my journey, that I very much doubt if I could ride all night."

"I scarcely know what to advise, my son. Perhaps, as you have just come, and nobody knows that you are here, you might venture to stay until daylight; but I would certainly try and get away by that time. How did you come?"

"On horseback, sir."

"Well, it is very evident that you cannot go back that way. We must devise some other way for you to travel, and it must be arranged at once; we have no time to lose. If the Yankees had not taken my horse, I would drive you myself in my buggy."

"Oh, Uncle John!" exclaimed Eva, "that would be the very thing! I would be willing for him to go, if you would go along to take care of him; but, indeed, he is not able to ride on horseback. Put his horse that he rode to your buggy."

"And how would I get the buggy back, my daughter?"

"Uncle John," said Julia, "perhaps I could devise a plan."

"Which will doubtless be a good one," he answered.

"I have determined to send Rebel to the army. Now if any way can be devised to send him from the place where Willie is going, you might put him to your buggy, and Bob shall go along on a mule, which you can drive back."

"That would do very well," answered Uncle John.

"But, sister," said Eva, "I want Willie to take Dixie away with him. She will be useful to him when he is able to exercise."

"Very well," said Julia, "that will be all the better, for we can put both the horses to the barouche, which will be much more comfortable for Willie than a buggy; and Bob will take two mules instead of one, for Uncle John to drive home."

"And so, girls," said Uncle John, "you are going to part with your riding horses?"

"Yes, sir," answered Julia. "I hope that they will both go into the Confederate service."

"Who is to have Rebel?" he asked.

"I have told Eva that she might give him away."

"I am going to send him to Dr. Beaufort, Uncle John. I would give him to Willie, but I would rather that he should have mine."

"Uncle John," said Julia, "do you think that you can devise any way of sending him to the army?"

He thought a moment, and then said:

"I have positively a great mind to put him on the cars, and run down to the army myself, and give him into Charles's own hands. I would like to see him and Walter."

"Oh, Uncle John, how I wish you would!" said Julia, earnestly.

"Do you, my daughter?" he asked, looking at her.

She colored a little, as she answered:

"Yes, sir, very much."

"Then," he said, "I will go."

"Indeed, sir," said Mr. Cameron, "it would be doing us a great favor. It would be a comfort to me for you to see Walter, and find out how the boy is getting on, and what he needs."

"And as to myself, Uncle John," said Willie, "I have no words to express my gratitude for the plan which you and Miss Julia have arranged, both for my physical comfort and for the pleasure of your society. I had both a lonely and a painful ride when I came here."

"You must have had, Willie, and I promise that you shall go away much more comfortably than you came. And so we will consider the arrangement made, and to-morrow morning we will leave at daylight. Julia, can you give us a cup of coffee so early as that?"

"Certainly, sir; and not that only, but a nice breakfast besides. Uncle John," she added, "will you do something for me?"

"With a great deal of pleasure, my daughter."

"You and Willie have very little baggage. If I pack a box of nice things, will you not take it to Walter, and—to Walter?"

"To Walter and to Dr. Charles, Uncle John," interposed Eva. "If sister sends a box, I insist upon Dr. Charles having a part of the contents."

"That must be as your sister pleases, Eva," replied Uncle John. "I shall do just what she requests. What do you say, Julia?"

"I would prefer it," she answered.

"Uncle John," said Eva, "you will please tell Dr. Charles, that as I have given my horse to Willie, and he does not need another, I would rather that he should have Rebel than anybody else."

"A message, Eva," replied Uncle John, laughing, "more truthful than agreeable. Perhaps your present might be more acceptable, if you do not send word that you give it because somebody else does not want it."

"Well, then, you can make the message to suit yourself; for I am too much bewildered just now to do anything right. Sister, you—but where is she?" she asked, looking round.

"Gone," replied her father; "she left the room a minute ago."

"Yes, Uncle John," said Eva, smiling even in her sadness, "such a stir as there will be now in that kitchen! One will be

beating biscuit, another parching coffee, another making bread, another preparing a turkey to roast; and sister herself will be stuffing a ham. The Yankees kindly left us four turkeys and six hams—and one of each will be sure to go. Presently she will be calling for me to come and make some cake, and get some pickles and preserves ready for packing.”

“That is not probable,” said Willie, “if you told the truth on yourself this morning, Eva; for if you should spoil the cake as you did then, and put the preserves into the pickle jars because your thoughts were somewhere else, you would prove a hinderance instead of a help.”

“Uncle John,” said Eva, “sister will work herself to death to-night. She will cook until daylight, and will have things nice enough and abundant enough for a prince. We have not a great deal in the way of provision left at the Hall now; but Walter and the doctor will never know it if they judge from that box.”

“I don’t doubt it, Eva. I know that she will send an abundant supply, and I know, too, that she would be more than repaid for her trouble if she could see the poor hungry fellows make acquaintance with her dainties. That sight will be one of the greatest pleasures of my visit to the army. But I must be going.”

“And so must I,” said the minister. “I am very sorry, Willie, to see you hurried off again in this way.”

“Mr. Derby,” he answered, “I cannot consent to go again unbaptized. Will you do it to-night?”

“Certainly, my son, if you wish it. Of course, then, the service must be at home.”

“No, sir. If it is possible, I would still prefer it at the church. Do you think it would be practicable, Mr. Cameron?”

“Practicable! certainly, Willie; but it must be done very quietly. I do not wish it to be known that you are here to-night.”

“It need not be known,” replied Mr. Derby. “Let him come to town after dark and drive to my house, and we will walk from there to the church, and nobody need know anything about it.”

“Very well,” replied Mr. Cameron, “that will do.”

“Uncle John,” said Willie, “ask Agnes and her mother to meet us at Mr. Derby’s. I would like to have them present.”

When they reached the door, Eva could not help laughing in spite of her sorrow, as she exclaimed:

“There, Uncle John, I told you so! Don’t you hear that beating going on in the kitchen? Those biscuits are being made in a fit of enthusiasm, and poor Aunt Sally’s arms will ache

when she is done. I wish that you could be behind the scenes to hear sister encourage her to beat hard and make them nice."

Her momentary cheerfulness was gone in an instant when she saw Mr. Derby and Uncle John actually going, and was reminded of that other parting which awaited her on the morrow. Uncle John saw the tears in her eyes, and said kindly, as he took her hand:

"Cheer up, my daughter, and try to bear it for Willie's sake. He needs all your help to enable him to keep up his spirits. His trial, Eva, is a sorer one even than yours."

"I will try," she answered, as two tears fell upon his hand; "but it is hard, Uncle John, very hard. You don't know how hard it is."

"Yes I do, my child. Uncle John knows all about it,—all about it, Eva," he repeated, thoughtfully.

When they were gone, she returned to Willie, in the library.

"Here, Eva," he said, pointing to the little chair, "bring it up close to the sofa and sit down. I have something to say to you."

"Well, Willie," she said, after waiting a minute or two for him to begin. "I am ready. What is it that you want to say?"

"I am going to ask you to make me a promise. Our separation just now will be very hard to bear, harder for me in my loneliness and weakness, than for you in your accustomed health and at home; but we have both promised to acquiesce in your father's decision. Now, to acquiesce is not to yield repiningly and complainingly to something against which we find it useless to struggle; it is to submit cheerfully, and this is now our duty. I want you to promise that you will try hard to bear up and be your bright cheerful self, and still your father's sunbeam, as he told me, the other day, that you had always been. We must be hopeful and thankful, Eva: thankful for the good Providence that has permitted us to know and love each other, and hopeful that the same goodness will watch over and preserve us for each other. This is right, is it not?"

"Yes, Willie, it is right, but hard to do; but because it is right, and you wish it, I will try."

"Another thing, Eva. You have promised to be my wife, and a wife means a helpmate. Of course, I know nothing as yet of a wife's influence, but I conceive it to be powerful, indeed almost irresistible, upon a man for good or evil. At any rate, I am persuaded that loving you as I do, you will always control my

actions in a great degree; and I want you to control them in the right direction and encourage me to do what is right. Now your father urged, as an objection to our marriage at present, that anxiety and distress at being separated from you would impair my energies, and tempt me to neglect my duty; and so it would, if I should leave you behind, unwilling for me to go, throwing every obstacle in my way, and persuading me that my duty was to you and not to my country. You are promised, Eva, to a soldier; should this war last so long that our patience shall be exhausted, and we cannot wait any longer, you will marry a soldier, one who purposes, if he has health and strength, to stay in the army until the war is over, and (I trust) the South is free. Now, you must help me to be faithful to my duty. Distressed you must and ought to be to give me up: I would not have you otherwise; but I would like to see my wife bear up under it like a true woman, such a wife, such a woman as it would be a privilege to fight for. Will you, darling?"

"I will try, Willie."

"One thing more. Whenever I shall be separated from you, both now and when I am in the army again, always write me cheerful letters. There will be enough that is depressing around me; let the voice from home and from you dispel, instead of deepening the cloud. Let me look forward to your letters as the prisoner does to the sunlight, and let my soul drink in their contents like a refreshing draught. Will you?"

"I promise, Willie."

"Once more. This night, when I shall have made those solemn vows, we will be bound together by a tie holier even than that which shall make us husband and wife. You too, Eva, have made those same vows. Let us see to it that we each help the other to keep them. Then we can be sustained in all our separation by 'a reasonable, religious, and holy hope,' that our bond of union will outlast this brief life, and," he added, thoughtfully and sadly, "that if our Father should see best soon to sever our love here, it will be renewed in that other home, where separation and anxiety are alike unknown."

Eva fairly broke down now, and burying her face in her hands, all her promises of restraint and self-control were swept away in a moment.

Willie watched her in silent sorrow. He had rather thought aloud than spoken, and his words had been involuntary, as he remembered the thousand dangers to which he was daily exposed.

After awhile she looked up, her lashes still wet with tears, and said, in a low earnest voice:

"Willie, if God should take you, I only pray that He will not leave me. I cannot live without you now."

His own eyes were dim as he answered, fervently:

"May God in his mercy spare us to each other!"

They sat in silence a long time. The shadows of the waning winter day were deepening, and the cheerful blaze of the fire had died out, leaving only the glowing coals to lighten the room. Eva leaned her face upon her hand and gazed steadily into the fire, as if she found there the object of her painful and anxious thoughts; and Willie looked just as steadily at her face, from which the careless happiness of childhood was all gone, and where in its stead was plainly written the intense anxiety of the woman. Willie was the first to speak.

"Forgive me, Eva, for what I said just now. I ought not to have done it. God knows, that I never design by word or deed to cast a shade upon your face or heart. Come," he added, cheerfully, "dry those tears and brighten up now. I don't want to remember you as sorrowful and tearful; and especially unwilling am I to feel that I have caused it. Let me tell you of my Southern home; of the mother and the other father that will welcome you there; of the brothers and sisters that I will give you; of the camelias and oleanders and cape-jasmines that will grow for you without the shelter of hot-houses and pits; of the broad, white cotton-fields, that look like acres of snow in mid-summer; and the magnolia-trees crowned with their magnificent white flowers and glistening leaves."

Eva's elastic heart soon rebounded from its depression; and she listened with interest and pleasure to Willie's animated description of his home. When he had finished, he said:

"We will be very happy there, my Eva; will we not?"

"Yes, Willie, very happy!" she answered, brightly. Then a cloud overspread her face, and she added: "But home! Father, sister, Walter, Mammy Nancy! Oh, Willie! how can I leave my home?"

"I will not ask you to give up your home, Eva. I only intend that you shall have two homes instead of one. I will take you to mine in the winter, and you shall bring me to yours in the summer."

"That will be charming!" she answered, gayly. "Yes, Willie, we shall be very, very happy!"

And standing on the threshold of life, with the bow of promise spanning all their future, those two young hearts, full of love and hope, saw nothing before them but peace and happiness; and, sheltered in the haven of their quiet home, they quite forgot the fierce swellings and surgings of the storm of war without.

"Eva," said Willie, "I want you to give me something to take away with me."

"You are welcome to anything of mine. What will you have?"

"I want your picture, and I want this ringlet," taking up a long, luxuriant curl.

"I cannot give you the first, Willie; for there is no likeness of me in existence, except a painful daguerreotype that you would not have."

"I wish very much," he answered, "that I had a painted miniature, and I will have it one of these days, if there is an artist in the land capable of doing justice to your face. But a daguerreotype is better than nothing. Can you not have one taken here?"

"I will try, but I don't believe that I will succeed in getting a likeness. I have attempted it frequently, and always failed."

"Well, try again, and don't forget it. Have one taken for me as soon as I am gone, and I will try and devise some means to get it. I must wait for that; but the ringlet I suppose I may have at once."

"Yes, this very minute if you want it. Here are the scissors; help yourself."

Quite unconscious of the damage that he was doing, and intent only on securing the treasure, Willie unhesitatingly severed the beautiful curl, and was holding it up admiringly, when Julia came in.

"Oh, Willie! oh, Eva!" she exclaimed. "What have you done?"

"What?" answered both, in the same breath.

"Why, child, you have cut off the richest, prettiest curl on your head, and just in the most conspicuous place, too! You have ruined yourself."

"Oh, Eva!" said Willie, in the most penitent tone, "how sorry I am that I took it! I would not have disfigured you for the world. Let me see," he added, turning her full face round to him. "Indeed, I do not miss it at all. You look just as pretty without it."

"Perhaps she does with that view," said Julia; "but turn her head the other way, and see if you do not miss it behind."

"There is a vacant space," said Willie, sorrowfully. "I am very sorry. Indeed, I did not know that I was doing any mischief. Can you not divide some of the others, Eva, so as to make one for this empty place?"

"Never mind, Willie," she answered, "don't disturb yourself about it. You are welcome to my curl, and if it gives you any

pleasure to have it, I would a great deal rather that it should be in your hand than on my head, and I am sure that if I don't mind losing it, nobody else need care. But you must let me put it up for you. If you roll it up as you are about to do, when you open it you will find, instead of a ringlet, a tangled, unsightly mass of hair."

She rolled it up smoothly into a flat curl, and secured it with a narrow ribbon, and when she gave it to him he said:

"It shall be my talisman in battle, Eva."

"Oh, Willie!" she answered, "how gladly would I give you every curl upon my head for that purpose!"

Julia had thrown herself into a chair with a weary sigh; and Eva, now looking at her, said:

"You are tired, sister, and I have been so selfish that I did not come to help you. I will do better next time."

"I did not want you, Eva. I should have been the selfish one to have asked it under the circumstances. I have seen everything begun now, and the servants can do the rest. After Willie is asleep to-night, you will help me pack the box, will you not?"

"Yes, sister, gladly enough. I will want something to do to keep me from thinking."

"Children," said Mr. Cameron, coming in, "we ought to have tea at once, and go to town as early as possible. With all the expedition that we can use, it will be late before Willie gets home and in bed, and he ought to have a good night's rest."

Julia hastened away in obedience to her father's suggestion. Tea was soon over, and by the time that it was fairly dark, they were on their way to town.

It was a moonless, but a clear, starlight night, when the little party quietly left Mr. Derby's house to walk to the church. Few words were spoken, for the circumstances were calculated to subdue and to solemnize. The party separated, and went different ways, unwilling that their destination and purpose should be known. It seemed, indeed, like the olden primitive time, when the early Christians, for fear of persecution, were compelled to seek the cover of darkness for the performance of their most solemn rites. Mr. Derby went a little before the others, and reached the gate first. He looked up and down the street, but all was deserted and still. He then applied the key, and was quickly within the yard, and then within the church. The others followed, and were soon gathered within the sacred building. The darkness and stillness were oppressive. Often, in other days of peace and prosperity, had they, together with a large congregation, been assembled at that same hour in that holy temple, when the full blaze of light revealed the most delicate carving

and tracery up to the very crown of the pointed roof; but never before had they been there when the pall of thick, black darkness, unrelieved by a single ray of light, had shrouded all its beauty in impenetrable gloom. Mr. Cameron, Willie, and Eva had not yet arrived, and the others, groping their way along, seated themselves in the first pew, and in silence awaited their coming. They were only a little way behind, and yet so long and oppressive did the minutes seem, that at last Mr. Derby went out to see if they were coming, half afraid lest something might have happened to detain them. To his great relief he met them at the door, which he locked after they had entered. A few moments afterward, a feeble light suddenly shone in the distance. It seemed a long way off, and was almost swallowed up by the surrounding darkness, but still it was sufficient to guide them to the font, around which the little company now silently grouped themselves. A single wax taper was their only light, and its flame, so delicate, yet shining so clear, pure, and steady, in the midst of the gloom around, was not an inappropriate emblem of that feeble but unmistakable light of a single Christian life which our Lord bids his followers "let shine" upon this sinful and darkened world.

With uplifted face, full of solemn, earnest purpose, the young soldier knelt to receive the baptismal stream. There upon his bended knee he was signed and sealed, pledged to another warfare than that in which he was already engaged; enrolled in another than his country's service.

It was done; and Willie arose, henceforth to be "Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."

When it was all over, Uncle John, with one of those impulsive outbursts that sometimes belied his title to that old age which he so constantly claimed, caught Willie in a tight embrace, and said, in a low voice, trembling with emotion:

"God bless you, my boy! God bless you!"

Mr. Cameron grasped his hand in silence; Eva clung to him with a suppressed sob; and Julia, with her eyes full of tears, only said:

"My *Christian* brother!"

That night, when all the others were in bed, the two sisters were busily engaged packing their box of provisions. Eva worked away steadily and silently, occasionally wiping away a tear, until at last she could restrain the flood no longer, and she sat down upon the floor in helpless grief. Julia said nothing as usual, but worked on quietly. After awhile Eva said, between her sobs:

"Oh, sister! how will I, how can I bear it?"

"You can and you will bear it, my darling, after what you have

seen this night. Far more than you can conceive now, will the recollection of this baptismal service sustain and comfort you when Willie shall be again exposed to the dangers of war. What would I—oh! what would I not give," she added, forgetting herself, "for such comfort with regard to——"

She checked herself, and Eva looked up and asked:

"To whom, sister?"

Julia did not answer; and Eva, absorbed in her own sorrow, did not care sufficiently for a reply to repeat the question. Presently she said, in a plaintive voice:

"Oh! how lonely and desolate, how troubled and anxious will my life hereafter be until this dreadful war is over, and Willie and I can be reunited, never more to be separated! I almost envy you, sister, with only Walter to be anxious about. May you never, never know the heavy burden that has been laid so suddenly upon my heart, and has changed me in a moment from the light-hearted child to the care-burdened woman."

Julia only replied by a deep sigh. When they were separating for the night, Eva kissed her sister, and said:

"How thankful I am to have so kind and good a sister to sympathize with me in my trouble. Sister, I cannot bear this alone; you will help me, won't you?"

"I will do all that I can for you, my child, but God alone can really help you."

Julia sighed again, as she remembered that, unlike Eva, she had never even had the comfort of sympathy.

The sisters went to bed: Eva's young heart and body already so wearied with her unaccustomed burden, that she fell asleep immediately from exhaustion; while the elder sister, long used to the struggle, laid awake for hours, indulging the painful train of thought awakened by Eva's unconscious words.

"I too," she thought, "have longed for sympathy; have longed for some heart into which I could pour my trouble. I have thought that Eva was too childlike to understand me, but now she can enter into all my feelings, now at last she can, as she says herself, help me to bear it."

The thought was soothing, and for a little while she rested calmly upon it; but then all at once came the dreary reflection:

"No, I cannot, either. I will not tell her that I have thought it my duty under the circumstances to shut myself out from the happiness which she is now enjoying in Willie's love. She is accustomed to confide in my judgment, and to follow my advice, and perhaps might think that, as in other things, so also in this, she ought to do what her sister thinks right. I may be wrong; others think so, though as yet I cannot see it; but I will not do

anything to thrust my morbid notions, as Uncle John calls them, upon her. She has told Willie all. He is satisfied; both are happy, and I will not be the one to disturb their peace. No, I cannot tell Eva even now. I must still bear my burden alone."

In the darkness and stillness of night, when we are shut out, as it were, from all human companionship and sympathy, and alone with our sorrow, it always seems heavier; and many circumstances combined to make Julia feel to-night, more than ever before, that her burden was intolerable. At last she exclaimed aloud:

"I cannot bear this any longer. I have borne it silently, and alone, until heart and body are alike sick. Surely it can be doing George no wrong to speak of the shame that he has chosen to publish to the world; and I feel that it is doing both Charles and myself a gross wrong, thus to have sent him away with no word of explanation. If ever I see him again, and he tells me that his feelings are unchanged, I will tell him all. I will tell him that it is not because I cannot, I do not love him, that I sent him away; yes, I will tell him as he told me, that I love him now, and will love him until I die! Perhaps he will be satisfied then; at least I will. When he knows the truth, and the whole truth, I shall be content."

At last she fell into an uneasy sleep, from which she was not long after aroused by a vigorous shake from Mammy Nancy, who said:

"Get up, Miss Julia, get up! It's daylight; the chickens is crowin' now. Master Willie ought to be gone this minute, if he don't want them Yankees to catch him; for people tell me that they is mighty early risers, if thar's any mischief to be done."

Julia sprang up hastily, saying:

"Go, Mammy, quickly, and awaken Eva; and don't leave her until she gets up, for if you do, she will certainly turn over and go to sleep again."

"Not this time!" replied Mammy, laughing. "I'll jest tell her that Master Willie is waitin' for her, and says she must come quick, and I'll be bound she'll hop like a pea on a hot shovel!"

"Are the gentlemen up?" inquired Julia.

"Bless your soul, child, long ago. As to old Master John, he don't look like he's been to bed at all. He has been at the stable, with Bob, for the last hour, looking at the harness, and makin' Bob give one good breakfast to that old mass of ribs that he's gwine to take along. I declar, Miss Julia, it's a disgrace to send sich a lookin' cretur as that from the Hall. The people will think that we's poor white folks, and ain't got corn enough to feed a mule! Howsomever, they'll know better than that, when they see them other horses. I'm glad that they's gwine along, for the credit of the family!"

In her zeal for the reputation of the Hall, Mammy had quite forgotten Eva, until Julia reminded her, and begged that she would urge her to dress as quickly as possible. The old woman left the room, saying:

"I'll have her dressed and down stairs, now, as quick as you."

The breakfast was a silent one; the sorrow of the children, as all the rest called them, clouding the other hearts. Uncle John said:

"Girls, have I neither letter nor message to take to Walter and Charles? The boys will not be glad to see me, if I go empty-handed."

"They will scarcely call you empty-handed," said Mr. Cameron, "when they see the inside of Julia's box. But I am sorry that there is no letter for Walter. He will be disappointed."

"You must tell him, Uncle John," said Julia, "how sudden and unexpected this whole thing was, and that, as we had not time to do both, I thought that these substantial proofs that he was remembered and cared for would be more acceptable than a whole sheet full of empty words."

"You are right, Julia. A hungry soldier may well be excused, and may love his home and family none the less, because he would rather eat a dozen home biscuits than to read a dozen home pages without the biscuits. And what message for Charles, Julia?"

"None," she answered.

"Now, Julia, that is not like you; that is not kind. I really think that his repeated allusions to his pleasant visits at the Hall, and his hope to repeat them at some future day, might meet with some recognition or response. Eva, are you too much taken up with Willie to have a kind word for your old friend? He does not often write without sending you a message."

"I like Dr. Charles just as much as ever," she answered. "If I did not, I would not give Rebel to him. You may tell him, Uncle John, how gladly I would welcome him back to the Hall, and that I hope he will give me the pleasure of doing so before long."

As they were returning to the library, after breakfast was over, Eva caught Uncle John's arm, and whispered:

"You must tell Walter all about Willie; and tell him that I am no longer the child that he left at home, but just as happy and just as miserable a woman as he could find in the Confederacy."

"Rather a contradiction in terms, I think, my daughter."

"Perhaps in terms, Uncle John, but not in reality. You understand what I mean."

"Yes, Eva, perfectly."

The sun was just above the horizon, when the preparations for departure were all complete. The barouche was at the door, supplied with Uncle John's buffalo robe, and pillows and blankets for Willie, who protested that he was no longer enough of an invalid to need these things. Julia, however, insisted that they should go along, and Willie, as usual, yielded.

"Let us bear it like Christians, my darling," whispered Willie, as he strained Eva to his heart. "It will not be always so. Some day we will meet to be separated no more."

Mr. Cameron now came into the library, to tell Willie that everything was ready. He looked compassionately upon them, and laying a hand on the head of each, said:

"Try to bear your separation, my children, and if I see that it is too hard, I will not be unmerciful. I will not separate you."

"Thank you, sir!" answered Willie, gratefully. "We will not abuse your kindness. We will, if you think best, try to wait submissively. Will we not, Eva?"

She did not answer, but clung to him, until her father gently released her, and seating her upon the sofa, said:

"You must go now, my son."

Willie clasped her once more tightly to his heart, held her there one moment, and was gone.

They were all now ready to go. Willie was in the barouche, and Bob was mounted upon Willie's horse, leading the mule which Mammy Nancy thought was so unfortunate an exponent of the wealth of Cameron Hall. She went up to the carriage, and said, with sincere sympathy:

"Good-by, Master Willie! God bless you! Keep up your spirits, and don't be down-hearted. I'll take good care of the child till you come back."

"Thank you, Mammy," he answered, shaking her by the hand. "If Eva is in your keeping, I know that she will be taken care of."

Mammy wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and as she turned round, with her face and heart full of sympathy, her eyes rested upon the unlucky mule. In an instant she forgot everything except the fleshless bones, which were to her a source half of mortification and half of mirth. The latter predominated now, and she called out:

"I say, Bob, don't let nobody steal your fat mule! Good-by, Master John!" she said, extending her hand. "Don't give that mule to none of them Secesh officers; and if any of 'em wants to buy him, jest tell 'em that master is gwine to make a Christmas present of him to Master Jeff Davis!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCLE JOHN was standing in Walter's tent, with his hands in his pockets, and an expression of unmingled satisfaction upon his face, a quiet spectator of the eager scrambling, the exclamations of delight, the smacking lips, and unequivocal relish of the contents of Julia's box. Charles Beaufort was with him, a looker-on rather than a participator in their enjoyment, and probably thinking rather of the giver than of the good things themselves.

"Pitch in, boys!" exclaimed Walter. "Pitch in, and help yourselves, and pay for that memorable breakfast that I once cooked for you."

"You may well call it memorable, Cameron," answered Mat. "I, for one, will never forget it. I thought that I was 'gone up,' when I tasted that mouthful, and was sorry that I had not time to make my will and leave you my last month's pay to buy yeast and soda."

"This is rather better bread than yours, Cameron," said Nelson, diving deep into the box, and bringing out a splendid-looking loaf, whose light-brown crust, just bursting, revealed the snowy flakes of the interior. "By Jove! this is bread, sure enough! Hallo, Ben, stop there! You are putting away that stuffed ham a little too fast; and as to Tom there, if some of you boys don't relieve him of that pickle-jar, the doctor will have to try his skill upon him presently."

"Hallo, Squire Butternut!" shouted Walter, as he saw the old man some distance off; "come here. It is thanksgiving day over here, and we want you at the feast."

He was not reluctant to accept the invitation; and as he received, at Walter's hands, a tin plate piled with the good things, he said, looking complacently at it:

"Well, this is what I call real good eatin'! My old woman, whose cookin' can't be beat, couldn't do no better than this. I see, my young friend, that there's somebody at your house that knows how to cook, though you ain't the one, sure!"

So saying, he seated himself upon a camp-stool, and proceeded to illustrate his approbation by attacking the food with as much determination of purpose as he ever fired upon a Yankee.

"Jupiter Tonans!" exclaimed Nelson, with his mouth full of stuffed ham, "this is food for the gods! Who upon earth could have seasoned it, Cameron? I'll fight for that woman, whoever she may be!"

"My sister Julia, I suspect," he replied. "She generally does it; and you are not the first man who has smacked his lips over the stuffed hams of Cameron Hall."

"Would she look at a fellow, Walter?" he asked. "I must try for a furlough, and go over. Any chance, Cameron, or has somebody else been before me?"

"I leave you to find that out for yourself, Nelson," he answered, laughing. "The Hall is a hospitable house, where you will be well received and well treated; and whenever you are so disposed, and can get that little piece of paper that a soldier always wants and seldom gets, you can make your comments in person to Miss Julia, upon the delicacy of her hams."

"And I," said Tom, with one hand full of yellow pickle, and the other full of walnuts, and his mouth crammed with pickled cherries, "I will go along, to give in my testimony that Miss Cameron's pickles quite equal her stuffed ham, and that no other woman in the Confederacy could make such."

"Look here, Tom," said Nelson, "are you skirmishing with those pickles yet?"

"No skirmishing!" said Mat, pointing to the three jars, one in front and one on each side of Tom, from which he was alternately helping himself. "It is a regular charge upon the center and both wings."

"And likely to be a successful one," quoth Butternut, wiping his mouth upon his coat sleeve, and putting his empty plate down upon the ground.

"Successful on the part of the pickles," said Nelson. "I think that they will fairly lay him out before he is done. I say, Tom," he added, with a sly wink at Mat, "if you eat too many of those pickles, just apply to Cameron here, and he will give you half a pound of soda to correct the acidity!"

And so they went on, laughing, and joking, and eating, as merry and jovial as if there had been no war in the land, and they were only on a pleasant excursion, learning, by way of variety, something of camp life. At last, when they were almost surfeited, Walter exclaimed:

"Look here, boys! we are not done yet. Here is something else. Let us see what is in this bundle."

He removed the wrapping and found two boxes of choice Havanas.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" they all shouted; "this is the best of all! Miss Cameron forever! long life, health, and happiness to Miss Cameron!"

"Not so fast, boys," said Walter. "I am afraid that you are not indebted to Miss Cameron for these. She does not approve of youths, like myself, smoking."

"Nevertheless, she certainly encouraged it in this instance, Walter," said Uncle John, now coming forward. "She sent those cigars herself. She says that you soldiers have so few luxuries and so many hardships, that she could not resist the temptation."

"Here, fellows!" said Walter, opening one box, "help yourselves."

They needed no urging; and while the box was passing round, Walter was about to break open the other, when he exclaimed:

"Hallo, doctor! Excuse me. I did not see your name. This is for you."

Charles took the box, and saw his name upon the lid in a delicate female hand. He opened it, and retaining the cover, passed the cigars around.

The match was quickly lighted, and in a moment the slender, blue smoke was curling over each head, and they were enjoying a luxury to which they were now altogether unaccustomed.

Only one cigar in the company remained unlighted, and old Butternut held his tightly in one hand, while he fidgeted restlessly, and dived into the various pockets of pantaloons, coat, and overcoat. At length, with a grunt of satisfaction, he drew out an old cob pipe with a short reed stem.

"I say, squire," said Nelson, winking at the others, "did you get your Meerschaum from Vienna?"

"What's that you say?" he asked, knocking the cob against the leg of his stool, to get rid of a few remaining ashes."

"Your Meerschaum!" repeated Nelson.

"What sort of a varmint is that?" asked Butternut, gravely, putting the stem into his mouth and blowing it vigorously.

Nelson forgot to pursue his joke, in his wonder and horror at seeing the old man deliberately break up the cigar and fill his pipe with the crumbs.

"The abominable old heathen!" he muttered. "To give you a choice Havana is worse than throwing pearls to swine."

He glared savagely at him, and if the order had been given that minute to charge bayonets, old Butternut's patriotic colored suit would scarcely have saved him from Nelson's wrath.

The feast was ended, and the labors of hours had all been swept away as in a moment, before the ravenous appetites of hungry soldiers.

"Soon over!" thought Uncle John, as he looked upon the remnants scattered around; "and yet could Julia have seen what I have, she would feel compensated for her trouble."

He and Charles now walked away to the tent, or rather the

log hut, which boasted the unusual luxuries of a chimney and a plank floor. A cheerful fire was blazing, and Uncle John said, as they went in :

"Very comfortable establishment this, for the army, Charles. But what is all this?" he added, pointing to paper, pen, and ink-stand upon an inverted tin bucket. "That looks like an impromptu writing-desk."

"That is just what it is, sir. I was writing home when I was sent for to the opening of the box."

"That was a sight worth seeing, Charles. I wish that Julia could have witnessed it herself."

"I wish that she could, sir," he answered, heartily; and then added, after a moment's hesitation, "the sight of a lady would be more acceptable to some of us here, than even the dainties that her hands have prepared."

"Come, come, Charles," said Uncle John, smiling, "don't say 'the sight of a lady.' Be honest, and say at once the sight of Julia Cameron. You know that she is the special one of the sex who is in your mind at this time."

"Very well, sir, have it so, if you like. I do not deny the charge, but frankly confess that I would like extremely to see her at this moment. And yet—and yet," he added, thoughtfully, "I don't know that it would give me any real pleasure after all."

"Charles," said Uncle John, looking earnestly at him, "I have suspected ever since you were at my house that there was some trouble between you and Julia, and what you have now said confirms these suspicions. Can it be possible that you two children, as well as Willie and Eva, have entangled yourselves in a love affair at this unfortunate time?"

"No, sir," he replied with a sigh.

"Well, what is the trouble? It is very plain that there is something weighing upon your mind."

Charles hesitated. The restraint that had been imposed upon him was more irksome to him at this moment than it had ever been before. It would have been a great relief to have given, without reserve, the confidence that Uncle John invited, and for an instant the confession trembled upon his lips. But then he remembered his unconditional promise to a request that specially excluded Uncle John from this confidence, and he was for a moment silent. Then, wishing to change the subject, he replied :

"You cannot expect me, with my temperament, to be a very gay, cheerful man, so long as I live in the midst of suffering. It depresses, it sickens me. I am sure that Nature never could have designed me for a surgeon."

"I am by no means sure of that, Charles," he answered. "It seems to me that you have the necessary requisites to make you eminent in your profession. You have skill, manipulation, and education, and besides these, you have enjoyed advantages in Paris which are not to be had in this country."

"That may be, sir; but there is one grave deficiency which counterbalances all these. I have not the nerve for a surgeon, neither have I that inordinate love of the profession which can make me forget the misery that I inflict, in the skill of the operation. I cannot so keep my feelings in abeyance as to cut and saw a human being as if he were a block of wood, and reserve my sympathies and compassion until my surgical assistance is no longer needed. To be a surgeon, a man should have a heart of gutta-percha and nerves of whalebone."

"And a man who hasn't them, but has, on the contrary, a heart of sympathy and nerves delicately strung, ought to have some recreation, some respite from these scenes of suffering, and that, Charles, is what you need now. You have been for months, without intermission, going through this painful routine, and you want rest and change. Why don't you apply for a furlough, and go away for a few days? You say that your hospital duties are very light now."

"I could be very well spared for a few days, just now, but I have nowhere to go. My home is so far off that I would not care to go there on a shorter furlough than three or four weeks, and this I would not feel justified in asking, when I have only been in service six months. If Hopedale were only within the lines, Uncle John, how glad I would be to go back with you! A week's absence from my post would suffice for quite a satisfactory visit there."

"I wish, with all my heart, that you could, Charles, but I am afraid that a visit there now would afford you neither rest nor pleasure. The thousand rumors of approaching raiding parties allow neither quiet nor security to the man who is obliged to get out of the way, as Willie can testify. Poor Willie! poor Eva! their dream of bliss was short."

"How long, Uncle John, before they will be married?"

"Mr. Cameron thinks that the idea of their being married now is absurd, but he will be obliged to relent. It is evident that they are both going to be very miserable apart, and as the children have gotten into the scrape and cannot get out of it, if I had the control of them, they should be married at once. When two young hearts are bent on anything of this kind, my observation is, that an old one coming between them cannot separate them long. I shall tell Cameron so, if he ever speaks to me on the subject."

"I little dreamed when I parted with Eva, a few months ago, so artless and childlike in her character, that she would be a wife before the elder one, so much more mature and womanly, so—in short, so superior in all respects to her child-sister."

"Now, Charles," exclaimed Uncle John, laughing, "it is well that Willie was not by to hear that, for, weak as he is, he would have thrashed you on the spot,—at least he would have tried to do it. It is as fortunate as it is singular through what different glasses we look at the same characters. Willie would be dumb with amazement to have heard what you just said, and nobody could make him believe that any man in his senses could really think Julia the more interesting and attractive of the two sisters."

"I am glad that he did not," said Charles, dreamily.

"He could not by any possibility have interfered with your success, if you have any intentions in that direction. Willie is nothing but a boy, and Julia always treated him as such; and her maternal care of him was quite a source of amusement to me. If their respective ages had been forty and ten, there could not have been more control on the one side, and more submission on the other."

"I'll warrant that he fell into the hands of a good nurse, Uncle John. A woman with so quiet and gentle a manner, and at the same time so much firmness and decision of character, cannot be otherwise than a good nurse."

"Indeed she is, nor could she have been more careful and untiring if she had been nursing Walter, instead of a stranger. And if you could only have seen her, with a face as pale as death, and compressed lips, but a tearless eye and a steady hand, help me to tie up some bleeding arteries in the absence of the surgeon, you would have witnessed a specimen of womanly fortitude worth seeing."

"Indeed, sir! I did not suppose that she could have done such a thing."

"Nor did I; but it was an unexpected emergency, and a case where delay would have been fatal. I needed help, there was no other at hand, and I called her up to me and whispered that she might save his life. That was sufficient; and I believe that if I had needed her for hours, she would have stayed with me and worked with me until it was all done."

"Indeed! she has more claim to the title of surgeon than I have. And was there no reaction?"

"Yes; one that both alarmed me and showed what powerful restraint she could impose upon her feelings. When she was no longer needed, I saw her totter out of the room, and followed

just in time to catch her as she fainted. When her consciousness returned, unselfish to the last, her first impulse was to beg me not to tell Willie, for fear that if she were needed again, it might make him unwilling for her to help him. And so we never told Willie. All that he knows is what he himself saw her do."

"One would think that was enough; and do you suppose that, after this, the foolish boy can think the younger sister the nobler character?"

"Undoubtedly he does. He does not depreciate Julia, he only exalts Eva. It is not that he admires Julia less, but that he loves Eva more."

"I suppose, Uncle John, that it is, as you say, fortunate for us that in these matters we have different tastes and preferences. For myself, I can only say that such a quiet exhibition of disregard and forgetfulness of self, such an instance of firmness and self-control on the part of a timid and delicately-organized woman, seems to me to partake, if not of moral sublimity, at least of something very nearly akin to it."

"So I thought, Charles, when she was lying dead before me, her face as white as the pillow on which it rested. She is a noble girl; although she has some few traits of character that I would like to alter."

"I cannot imagine, sir, what they can be. It is true that you have known her much longer than I have; but there is so much openness and candor and truthfulness in her character, that if you are acquainted with her at all, you must needs know her well. The only barrier to a speedy acquaintance with Miss Cameron is her reserve, and when once that is overcome, her whole character is as clear as the transparent brook, whose every pebble can be plainly seen at the bottom. I know her well. You need not smile, Uncle John, for I feel that I know her, even though my intercourse with her, unlike yours, may be reckoned by days instead of years. I understand her thoroughly, and there is nothing in her character that I would take the responsibility of altering."

"And yet, Charles, she has peculiarities (for such they are rather than faults) that I would like exceedingly to alter; peculiarities which affect her happiness rather than mar her character. She has some morbid notions which, for her own sake, I would like to eradicate, and yet while I deprecate them I cannot but respect them, because their very morbidness shows the high tone to which her nature is strung. And then, too, this very reserve of which you have just spoken I would like to change, because it prevents her from being properly understood and appreciated. Julia will go through life with less affection and admiration than she deserves, because she is shut up in a reserve which some

people cannot, and others will not, take the trouble to penetrate."

"But, Uncle John, is not that reserve the result of diffidence and timidity, faults, if such they can be called, not too frequently met with, and certainly very pardonable in one of her sex?"

"It may be partly the result of these, but not altogether. Julia's heart is warm and her affections strong; but she is quite satisfied to expend them all on a few objects. I do not believe that she really cares to have a large circle of friends. The few that she loves, she clings to, and they are in turn devoted to her, and she asks and wants no more. In this, she does not do herself justice. She deserves to be universally beloved, and she cannot be, because she does not allow herself to be known."

"Such a character may not shine so much in the world, Uncle John; but it will certainly make the brightness and happiness of home, and that, after all, is woman's true sphere."

"So it is, Charles, and I would be the last one to wish her to sacrifice this to the other; but I think that a little less of one and more of the other would better equalize and harmonize her character—that is all. Don't be uneasy, my boy. I have no desire to upheave her character and reconstruct it, for nobody has better reason to be satisfied with it, just as it is, than Uncle John."

"I should think not, for you are one of the few whose love seems so completely to satisfy her."

Charles sighed with a vain longing to be admitted within that narrow circle, and to feel himself as necessary to her happiness as he knew that she was to his. Presently he said, abruptly:

"Did you not tell me, Uncle John, that Rebel was a present from Eva?"

"Yes, that was her message."

"I thought that he belonged to the elder sister."

"And so he did; but Julia wanted to send him to the army, and gave Eva the privilege of disposing of him as she pleased. He is a splendid animal, Charles, and you must take good care of him, both to gratify the girls and on account of his intrinsic value. Julia was warmly attached to him. I surprised her, the morning that I left, in a little quiet demonstration that she did not intend anybody to see. I found her in the stable with her arms around the horse's neck; and when she became aware that there was an unexpected witness of the scene, she could not, in her haste, wipe away all traces of tears before she looked up. 'I want him to go,' she said, sadly, as she patted his neck, 'but I am very sorry to part with him. I could scarcely love him more if he were a human friend.'"

"I will take care of him, sir," said Charles, earnestly.

Just then Walter came rushing by, exclaiming:

"Uncle John! Doctor! They have just brought in a spy to headquarters!"

And on he went, without a moment's pause, eager to see and to hear all about it.

"He will be disappointed," said Charles, "that he was not the fortunate man to bring him in. He once told me that he would like nothing better than to be the brave captor of a spy."

Then the conversation returned to its old channel; both finding in the quiet life at Cameron Hall pleasanter themes than could be afforded in the bustling and stirring scenes of war and the camp. Charles did not think that his promise extended to a concealment of his admiration for Julia's character; and of this he continued to speak freely and without reserve, endeavoring at the same time to talk of her as he would have done of a common acquaintance; and although Uncle John could not be deceived, and felt assured that there was underlying all this something of a deeper and tenderer nature than was acknowledged, yet since Charles was not disposed to open his heart to him, he delicately forbore, by word or look, to betray his suspicions.

They had been talking some time, when a head was thrust in at the door, and Nelson said, addressing himself to Uncle John:

"You seem to be a friend of Cameron's, sir. Will you please come to him, for we boys cannot do anything with him."

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Uncle John and Charles in the same breath.

"Have you not heard, sir? The spy that was brought in, awhile ago, turns out to be his brother George; and between mortification and rage, the boy is well-nigh deranged."

Not a word was spoken, and for a minute neither moved. Dumb and motionless, Uncle John thought of Cameron Hall, and Charles of the sister, whose heart he well knew such a sorrow would pierce with a doubly poisoned fang.

Without a word either to each other or to the messenger, they both arose, and followed Nelson to Walter's tent, where they found the youth in a pitiable condition indeed. Mingled sorrow, anger, and mortification swelled into a bitter tide, to which the boy gave way with all the passion of a strong nature. In his fury, he heaped up maledictions upon his traitor-brother; and, for the time being, that brother's inevitable and mournful doom was forgotten in the agony of shame which his treachery had entailed upon his family. There was no such thing as either soothing or comforting him, and Uncle John found that he could do nothing but wait in silence until the passion had exhausted itself.

"It would seem enough," he exclaimed, bitterly, "to have been a traitor, to have fought against his country, home, father, brother—but to be a traitor-spy! to be held up to the execration of the world; to be hung and thrown into a dishonored grave! Oh, God! he deserves it all, and I would not alter the sentence; but it is more than I can bear that he should be my brother, that he should be called by my name!"

Poor Walter! he made his first acquaintance with sorrow through a bitter trial; and it came in a form which his impetuous temper was ill calculated to bear. Unacquainted with his brother, forgetful even of the wrongs and petty tyranny which had been the torment of his infancy, to Walter as well as to Eva there had been something shadowy, undefined, unreal, in the feelings which that brief newspaper paragraph had awakened. He could not enter into the keenness of the mortification and sorrow of his father and elder sister; but suddenly, and in a moment, it had all come home to him now, and the unreality before only increased the severity of the blow, and its unexpectedness made it but the heavier. After awhile he said, suddenly:

"Go and see him, Uncle John; I will not, I cannot. It may be that he will have some message for my father, some word of regret for the disgrace that he has left upon a stainless name, some word of repentance, some prayer for forgiveness for the sorrow that he has brought upon a happy family. My poor father! It is a pity that, like my mother, he too could not have rested in a quiet grave, before his old age had been blighted by such a curse!"

"I will go and see him, my son; but suppose that your brother should want to see you; suppose that he should prefer to talk to you rather than to send a message by one who is a stranger to him?"

"Whatever he may have to say, bid him say it to you, sir; for I will never see him. I have now no recollection of him, and I will not have my only memory of my elder brother that of a traitor and a spy. Would to God I could forget that he had ever lived!"

Uncle John made no reply, but went out to fulfill Walter's request. His application at headquarters was not refused, when he made himself known as the friend of the prisoner's father, and he was permitted to see him. He found him sitting in a tent, manacled and chained, and under heavy guard, waiting to be sent by the earliest train to Richmond, there to await his trial by court-martial. His hat was pulled over his face, and his head was bent down upon his breast, so that not a feature was visible; and yet there was something in his appearance and attitude which

assured Uncle John, as he approached him, that this was not the first time he had seen that man.

He did not seem to be aware of the presence of any one, or if he was, no perceptible movement betrayed it. Uncle John went up close to him, and said, in a voice of mingled sorrow and pity:

"George Cameron!"

He looked up suddenly, and revealed the features of Agnes's gloomy stranger-friend on the steamer.

The recognition was mutual, but neither acknowledged it in words; and after the surprise was over, the prisoner said coldly, and with a half-suppressed sneer:

"To whom am I indebted for the honor of this visit? In my circumstances I certainly have no right to expect a visit from anybody in the rebel army, unless, indeed, it might be prompted by curiosity."

"No idle curiosity has brought me here, George," said Uncle John kindly. "I am the most intimate friend of your father and sisters, and I have come this moment from your brother's tent."

He waited for a reply, but none came for several minutes, and then the question was coldly asked:

"If not curiosity, then may I ask again what brought you here?"

Uncle John could not quite conceal a little irritation in his tone as he replied:

"Nothing but a feeling of interest and sympathy which I must ever have for one of the Cameron family, even in such circumstances as yours."

"For which I should doubtless be profoundly grateful; but, inasmuch as I have gone thus far through life without much of either sympathy or interest, I may not be so much to blame if I should fail to appreciate them properly. As to my circumstances," he added, with a short, bitter laugh, "they are rather unpleasant, but not altogether unexpected. They are but the fate of war, and such I knew were the chances when I accepted the mission."

Again there was a pause. There was a hardness, a bitterness in the tone and words of the man, that repelled all sympathy and crushed all kindly feeling. Uncle John was strongly tempted to leave him in disgust, but he remembered that he was a Cameron, and he determined to bear anything, in the faint hope of eliciting one word that might alleviate the sorrow of those at home.

The prisoner's head drooped upon his breast, and there was every indication that his visitor's departure would be the most

acceptable part of the interview, but Uncle John resolutely determined not to see it. After a little while he said, kindly :

"George, have you no message for those at home,—for father, sisters?"

"No," he answered sullenly. "Father and sisters have not been such to me."

"And whose fault was that, George?"

"And by whose authority," he answered fiercely, his eyes gleaming, and his hands working uneasily, as if he longed to burst his fetters, "by whose authority do you thus catechize me and pry into the secrets of my early life?"

"On my own authority, George Cameron," answered Uncle John firmly, his own eye flashing. "Not from the impertinent curiosity to which you persist in ascribing it, but from what now seems a vain hope of extracting from you one word of kindly remembrance, one word of filial regret, one prayer for the pardon of those whom you have so deeply wronged. Listen to me, George Cameron. You must, you shall hear me. Within a few months I have seen your father's erect, vigorous frame bowed beneath the weight, not of years, nor altogether of sorrow, but of mingled sorrow and shame. I have seen his hair rapidly growing gray, and his cheeks furrowed with the deep lines, not of age, but of care. I have seen your sister writhe in agony at the thought of a blighted name. You have done it all, and I did hope, though it seems in vain, that from the sad end of a sad career you might perhaps find it in your heart to speak one word, to send one message that might soften the bitterness of their mortification and sorrow."

"Now I swear," he exclaimed, "this is beyond endurance! If these hands were only free you would not dare to talk to me in this way. I am no boy, no child, to be thus called to account for my actions, and if I were, you are not the man to do it. Guard! put this old man out of this tent."

"Not yet," said Uncle John quietly but firmly. "My visit is not ended yet, and as it is the last one that I shall ever inflict upon you, I beg that you will bear with me only a few minutes longer. Do I understand you to say that you have no message for your father?"

"No, none, unless you choose to tell him that I glory in dying in the United States service, and only regret that I must go without seeing this accursed rebellion crushed. Will he be glad to receive that message? Will you be willing to bear it?"

Uncle John did not answer the question, but said in reply :

"One more question, George Cameron. Where is your wife?"

"By heaven!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth, "if this im-

pertinent old man is allowed thus to torment me while I am bound hand and foot, I will burst with rage, and the Confederate halter will be cheated out of one victim! Who told you that I had a wife, and what business is it of yours where she is? Would you take care of her? You, the high-souled, spotless Confederate, would you extend a helping hand or give a word of sympathy to the wife of a traitor-spy?"

"Sneer on, George Cameron," he answered calmly; "sneer on. Yes, I would take care of her, I would make any sacrifice for her and her child. If you will only calm yourself and listen to me a few minutes, perhaps I can show you what business it is of mine whether you have a wife and where she is."

Without waiting for the permission which he knew that he would not receive, he told him in a few words the story of his life. His eye moistened with tenderness, as it always did, when he spoke of the child to whom he believed that he owed all that was kind and gentle in his nature. When he had finished the brief history, he said:

"On his dying bed in my own house her old father asked and received forgiveness for the wrong that had poisoned my whole life, and in token of the sincerity of that forgiveness, he exacted of me a promise that if I should ever find that child for whom he had vainly searched, I should befriend her and be kind to her. From what I have told you, you will not suppose that the promise was hard to make or would be difficult to keep. That child, George Cameron, is your wife; does it still surprise you that I should ask what has become of her?"

Very different now were the aspect and manner of both listener and narrator from what they were when the story began. Gradually George Cameron's fierce, defiant, insulting manner had given place to an expression of deepest interest, while Uncle John's irritation and excitement had softened down into that tone of affection, nay almost of reverence, with which he always spoke of that child. To his question the prisoner replied, almost humbly:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did you wrong; it was not impertinent curiosity."

He paused a moment, and added, sadly:

"I wish that I could tell you, or rather, I wish that somebody could tell me where my wife and child are."

"Why, why did you ever leave them, George?"

"On my honor, sir——" he stopped a moment, and added, with a little of the old bitterness, "if you can believe me possessed of such a thing—on my honor it was not my intention to desert my wife. I had always been of a restless, roving disposi-

tion, and even from my earliest childhood the restraints of home were irksome to me, and at last became intolerable. I never could bear to be tied down to any place or any routine, and even domestic ties failed to overcome the restlessness of my temper. It was not that I was wearied with my wife, but rather with the monotony of the life of that quiet country village. I longed for something exciting, something varied; and the descriptions of life in the mining districts of California seemed to offer just what I wanted. I did not think, however, that it was the place to take my young wife and her infant child, because I had not the means to make them as comfortable in that extravagant country as they were at home. And so I left them, honestly purposing to return, when I had made sufficient money, and take them there too."

"But you did not. You neither came back to them, nor wrote for them to come to you."

"No, sir, there was my fault,—a fault still to be attributed rather to my roving disposition than to any willful intention to wrong my wife. My expectations in California were fully realized; not the golden dreams which allure so many, for these were but secondary attractions to me. I found what my nature craved: an ever-shifting scene, a constant excitement, a life of adventure, and I was fully satisfied. At first I persuaded myself that until I was wearied with this life and was ready to settle down permanently, it would not be right to bring my wife to a wild country where woman needs a protector always with her; but, while I was waiting for the time to come when I could bring her to me, I was, at the same time, gradually and insensibly becoming accustomed to being without her, until, at last, I found that my happiness was quite as independent of her as it was before I ever knew her."

"But did it never occur to you that perhaps hers might not be altogether so independent of you?"

"Yes, sir, it did at first; but after awhile all such thoughts quieted down, and I seemed to take it for granted that she could learn to do without me as well as I had learned to do without her."

"And did not her letters awaken a pang of remorse?"

"Yes, sir, as long as they came; but after awhile they too ceased, and there was nothing to remind me of wife and child except a lingering memory, painful because it was linked with the consciousness of wrong, and therefore I strove to forget. So it went on for years, but at last the punishment came, as it always must. It required a long time to satiate me with California life, but at length I grew tired of it. Its very excitement and variety

became monotonous, and when I had grown familiar with all its phases I wanted something new. Quiet and repose were now the novelties for which I longed, especially when my health began to fail, and I needed the comforts of home and the gentle offices of a wife. So I came back to find them, never dreaming of the disappointment that awaited me. So accustomed had I been all my life to carry out my own purposes, and to bend circumstances to my will, that it never occurred to me now that the home and wife that I wanted would not take me back with open arms and a glad welcome. I never even thought of the possibility that death might have interfered with my plans; but I went back to my deserted home as confident of finding it as if I had left it but the day before. Had I found wife and child dead I should have been surprised, but I could have borne it; but to be told that they had been gone for years, none knew whither, only added a new impulse to my determination to find them, at the same time that it irritated me to find myself so completely baffled. Had I been in my wife's place I should probably have acted just as she did, and should have placed myself beyond the reach of a faithless husband; but we are prone to expect only endurance and forgiveness from the gentler sex, and I was stung to the quick when I found that I, in common with too many others, had presumed too far upon these traits of character. And now I wanted my child, and I determined to bend all my energies to find her; but her mother has shown marvelous sagacity in selecting her retreat, for years ago I gave up the fruitless search. Perhaps I may be finding fault with the dead, for I remember sometimes with a pang what a gentle, loving nature hers was, and how little calculated to bear the chilling effects of desertion; but then she had no right to die without leaving some clew by which my child might find her father. Such, sir, is a brief history of my life. In it there is much to condemn, and much, too (if you knew all), to excite your commiseration and sympathy. I have sometimes thought," he added in a sad, regretful tone, "that perhaps all my trouble may be traced back to my first wrong step. I remember learning at my mother's knee the curse pronounced upon the disobedient child."

He relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and Uncle John hoped that memory had wandered back to his childhood's home, and the mother of whom he had spoken, and that he would soften and melt under the influence of such thoughts. He waited some minutes for him to speak, but he did not, and then Uncle John asked:

"How comes it, George, that I find you now in such painful circumstances?"

"I had no home, sir, and I had lived upon excitement so long that I could not do without it. For awhile I found something new, both in kind and degree, in the excitement of the camp and the battle-field; but that, like all the rest, palled upon my taste, and I sought a higher flavor, a keener spice, in the risk and danger of my present disastrous mission."

"Perhaps, George, you will allow your father's friend the privilege of asking you one question. Why, in seeking the excitement of the camp and the battle-field, did you not seek it on the right side? Why, oh why did you take up arms against country, home, father?"

The softness and gentleness were all gone in an instant. The deep frown came back, and in a peremptory tone, that plainly prohibited all discussion of that point, he only answered:

"We will not discuss that question. I did as I thought best."

"George," said Uncle John, "I have persisted in this interview, when, had you been another than a Cameron, you would long since have driven me away; but, as your father's son, I must in any and all circumstances be interested in you. God only knows how from my soul I regret to find you in this condition. Tell me, is there nothing that I can do for you?"

The expression of his face softened for a moment; but then, as if determined to crush out all such feelings, he replied, in a flippant, reckless tone, clanging his hand-cuffs together as he spoke:

"Nothing, unless you strike these off, and turn me loose again, to give plenty of valuable information to the Federals,—and I rather suspect that you are too good a rebel for this. No, no! it is the fate of war; and all that is left me to do now is to submit cheerfully, and swing gracefully."

"Would you not like to see a minister, George? You remember Mr. Derby. He is still in Hopedale, and would esteem it a privilege to do anything to comfort or benefit one of your father's children. You are to be sent to Richmond; he will go there to see you, if you would like it."

"Oh no, sir! Such a journey, for such a purpose, would be quite unnecessary. I know all that he would tell me, and if I cannot get ready to die myself, he cannot do it for me."

"Have you any hope of being acquitted?"

"None in the world, sir. The evidence is as clear as day. Papers, maps, and drawings were found upon my person that would have enabled the Federal army to give you a surprise, which would have more than redeemed the Bull Run disaster of last July. Oh no! there is no hope for me. Half the evidence would be enough to convict me."

"Have you a Bible, George?"

"Why, sir," he replied, with a dry, hard laugh, "I have not seen one for years."

"Have you a prayer-book?"

"I left the last one that I ever owned upon the table in my room, when I turned my back upon Cameron Hall."

"Then take this, George," he said, taking one from his pocket, "and promise to read it. You will find in the office for the visitation of prisoners, and in the prayer for persons under sentence of death, something adapted to your wants and circumstances."

He gave him the book, open at the place, and George replied, with a poor attempt at levity, as he glanced at the page:

"I am much obliged for your intended kindness, but, indeed, sir, I cannot accept it as adapted to my circumstances. This prayer and exhortation, for instance, are said to be designed for a 'criminal.' Now, inasmuch as I utterly disclaim all pretensions to being anything of the sort, they are evidently not designed for me. However, if it will oblige you, I will read them, and try and find out how a malefactor ought to feel."

Uncle John heaved a deep sigh at the hardened and determined indifference with which the unhappy man was resolved to meet his fate. He got up to go away, and George seemed to soften again, as he said:

"What has become of my little blind friend? Was the operation successful?"

"It was not. The surgeon pronounced her hopelessly blind, and I brought her back to her mother, several months ago."

"I became singularly interested in that child. She is one of the few friends that I have made of late years. I am not socially inclined now, but I believe that I should soon have learned to love that little blind musician."

"You are not alone in that respect. Agnes never fails to make friends of all who know her. She frequently speaks of you, and wonders if you are any happier now than you were then."

An expression of pain rested upon the prisoner's face. The kind recollection, and the sympathy of the blind child, evidently touched him deeply; and as he held Uncle John's hand, he said, in a subdued voice:

"Give my love to her, and tell her how much I should like to see her once more. Don't tell her," he added, averting his eyes, and with a slight hesitation, "where you have seen me, and under what circumstances. Just say to her that you saw me in the army."

Uncle John silently wrung the fettered hand, and turned away. The prisoner pulled his hat over his face, and his head drooped lower upon his breast than before, but this time in the attitude of sadness rather than that of sullen defiance.

Uncle John and Charles were sitting that night in their hut before the fire. Both were busy with their thoughts, and but few words had been spoken upon the subject which engrossed their minds. They had now been silent a long time, and the only movement was an occasional rejection of the white ashes from the almost extinguished cigar. Uncle John was the first to speak, and then it was rather thinking aloud than talking.

"Poor Julia! This will be the overflowing drop to the brimming cup."

Again there was a dead silence of several minutes, and then Charles answered:

"Yes, to one of her integrity and right-mindedness, such a blow will be severe, indeed."

"Ah! Charles, you do not know her as I do. You have never seen her writhe under the mortification occasioned by her brother's conduct. You have never heard the bitterness with which she speaks of the family disgrace."

"Does she imagine, sir, that her brother's conduct can affect the character of any of the rest of the family?"

"Yes, she believes that it has already involved them in a common shame. Why, sir, she has begun to be afraid of almost everybody; afraid to intrude herself, as she says, upon the society even of friends, because she feels that the honest and the right-minded will now always think of her only as George Cameron's sister. On this point she is wrong, all wrong. This is one of those morbid notions which I told you this morning I would like to eradicate. Morbidity is scarcely a strong enough word to express the state of her feelings, and yet I am afraid that they are hopelessly fixed. At least I have exhausted all my arguments and persuasion in trying to convince her that she is wrong."

A light began to dawn upon Charles's understanding, and he grasped with eagerness what seemed a key to the mystery of her conduct toward him. He made no reply, for Uncle John's words had transported him in an instant to the lawn of Cameron Hall, on that last night, when Julia, trembling with emotion, yet firm as a rock, had told him of the insurmountable barrier, the unalterable determination.

"She did not know," he thought, "that I had ever heard of her brother's disgrace, and she scorned to take advantage of my ignorance, and to bind me by ties which an honorable man cannot

break. But when she hears that I know it all; that George Cameron's treason, were it, if possible, fouler and blacker than it is, could not in my eyes cast a shadow, much less a stain, upon her; when she knows that the combined disgrace of all the Camerons upon earth could neither alter my opinion of her nor change my feelings toward her,—then she will, she must see it in a very different light, and we may yet be happy. I say *we*, for I remember well that she did not say she could not love me; and if such had been the truth, her truthful lips would certainly have said it; and besides, I have evidence to the contrary."

Had Uncle John been less deeply absorbed in his own sad thoughts, the sudden change in Charles's tone and manner would have seemed both surprising and unaccountable. As it was, he did not notice the cheerful, almost gay tone, with which he said:

"It seems to me, Uncle John, that I could convince her that she took an unreasonable view of the case."

"Then you are a better logician, and a more skillful pleader than I am, and if you can, I wish that you would do it; it would be nothing more than common humanity to save such a heart as hers from unnecessary sorrow. But I think, Charles, that you are mistaken. You do not, perhaps, overestimate your powers, but you do not realize what you have to encounter. Julia is not hasty in her decisions, and consequently they strike the deeper, and are the more difficult to uproot. The truth is, I do not believe that anybody will be able to change her notions upon this subject. For myself, I have long since ceased to allude to it, because, as I tell you, it has never done any good, and I cannot bear to see her shrink as if I were touching a painful wound. To one of your profession, it needs no argument to prove that where a wound is incurable, it is neither wise nor kind to persist in the torture of the probe and the knife."

Uncle John's words again plunged Charles into a reverie, and his castle of hope, reared as it had been upon the foundation of a single word, was now as quickly demolished, as he thought:

"If Uncle John, the old privileged friend, cannot approach this subject, how can I dare to do it? And yet, if I do not tell her that this insurmountable barrier is no barrier at all to me, she will still think that it separates us as widely as ever. I will ask Uncle John if he does not think that the interests involved will justify the pain that I must inflict, and he shall advise me. But no, I cannot do that either, for my promise binds me."

He was bewildered and perplexed, and the remainder of this, their last evening together, was spent in thoughtful silence.

The next morning Uncle John returned home. Walter held his hand, and said, in a low voice:

"Tell sister that I would give anything on earth to be at home now. I would like to hide my head from all the world until this is forgotten. But as this cannot be, tell her that I shall only strive the harder to do my duty, so that the faithfulness of one Cameron shall, so far as may be, atone for the errors and crime of another."

"Cheer up, Charles," said Uncle John, as he took leave of him. "As soon as I think that you may come to Hopedale without risk, I will write for you. The air and the society," he added, with peculiar emphasis upon the last word, "will refresh and invigorate you."

"And I, sir, will need no urging, if I can be spared for a few days, and can come safely."

All the way home, Uncle John was thinking, with a troubled heart, of the sad duty before him. To have told them of Walter's death would have been painful enough; how much worse to tell them of the fearful doom, the punishment of treachery, that awaited the eldest son, the eldest brother! But while he dreaded the unwelcome task, he yet rejoiced, for their sakes, that they would not hear it from indifferent lips, but would first learn it from one who knew the pain that he inflicted, and would sympathize with the sorrow that he gave.

When he reached the Hall, he was met by both the girls, who ran out to welcome him. Eva was all eagerness to get the letter that she was sure Willie had sent, and Julia's face wore a happier look than he had seen for a long while, as she thought that now she would hear something directly from Charles as well as Walter. Poor Uncle John was more troubled than ever, when he saw her face so lighted up, and he tried hard to keep his own from betraying the pain that was at his heart. But her quick eye at once detected something wrong, and with the smile upon her face instantly frozen, she exclaimed, in a voice of agony:

"Oh, Uncle John, you have bad news for us!"

"Yes, my daughter," he answered, sadly, "but not what you fear. Walter and Willie are both well."

"And Charles?" she gasped, forgetting for the moment that she had seemingly no right to be so anxious about him."

At another time, Uncle John would have been surprised; but now his thoughts were otherwise engrossed, and he answered, without thinking:

"Charles, Julia, is well."

He took a hand of each of the girls, and led them into the library, and there told his sad story. Eva listened with more anger than sorrow. She felt her own and her family's wrongs more than the miserable fate of her stranger-brother. She felt

as if she had been injured by one whose connection with her was that of circumstance or accident rather than the alliance of flesh and blood; and she was disposed to resent it as an injury rather than to receive it as an affliction. But Julia viewed it otherwise. Once, she too had felt a resentment for which she had reproached herself, but which she could not then overcome; but it was all gone now. There was no room for anger in her heart now. There was nothing but a leaden weight of grief and horror at the thought of her brother's doom.

Her father was not at home, and at her earnest request Uncle John stayed, until his return, to tell him.

"I cannot, Uncle John," she said, with quivering lip, "I cannot tell him this. Poor papa!"

Uncle John went home immediately after tea, and as soon as he was gone, they all went to their several rooms: Mr. Cameron to brood in solitude over a calamity which far outweighed all the happiness of his life; Eva to try and forget her sorrow and anger in another perusal of Willie's letter, whose assurances of sympathy and love made her young heart feel that no trial could be intolerable so long as she had him to share it; and Julia to ponder in loneliness a sorrow bitterer far to her than death. For awhile, all else was swallowed up in the single thought that her brother was about to be launched into eternity by a sudden and violent death, and her heart sickened at the recollection that there was nothing in all his past history, and especially nothing in his present circumstances, to warrant her in hoping that he was prepared to meet his doom. Uncle John had not told them one word of regret or repentance; he had told nothing on which she dared to build the slightest hope, and well she knew that if there had been one look or word which could have afforded comfort, his kind, considerate heart would have treasured it up and brought it home. By degrees, other thoughts came into her mind; thoughts of her father's blighted and dishonored age; of her young brother, whose message to her had touched her to the heart. She thought of herself, her own keen suffering, and wondered if this sensitive shrinking from dishonor and disgrace, this anxiety that all who were connected with her should stand pure and fair, not only in the sight of God, but also of their fellow-men,—if this feeling could be wrong, could be a sin. Lastly, she thought of Charles; and while her heart was wrung by the certainty that now they were sundered by a barrier which he himself would think impassable, yet at the same time her true nature rejoiced that he was not bound to her by the tie even of a plighted word; that he was not reduced to the painful alternative of either breaking his faith or marrying the sister of George Cameron. Now she felt

assured that the subject would never be renewed : indeed, she thought that she and Charles had seen each other for the last time, and from her inmost soul she thanked God that she had been enabled to stand so firm, and to do what she believed to be right, amid so many and so strong temptations, both from his entreaties and her own earnest longings.

"Farewell, Charles !" she thought. "If you marry at all, it must be a woman whose name as well as character is without a stain."

Before he went home, Uncle John stopped at the cottage to see Grace and Agnes, and to deliver George Cameron's message. He said nothing to Grace, in Agnes's presence, of the painful subject of his thoughts ; but leading the child away from the organ to her little chair by the fire, he said :

"Do you remember, my daughter, the gloomy stranger upon the steamer who became your friend ?"

"Very well, sir," she answered, her face brightening.

"I saw him at the camp the other day, and he recognized me the moment that he saw me. He inquired particularly about you, and sent his love to you, and says that it would give him great pleasure to see you again."

"Is he a soldier, Uncle John ?"

"Yes, Agnes."

"I am glad of it, for I know that he must be happier now than he used to be. He told me on the steamer that he was lonely, that he had no friends, and nothing to do that interested him ; but now that he is in camp, with all the other soldiers, he must have plenty of company ; and if he is fighting for his country he has found something to interest him. Poor Mr. George ! I am so glad that he is happier. Did he look so, Uncle John ?"

"He always looked sad, Agnes. You know I have often told you so."

"You said that he looked dark and frowning, Uncle John, and did not look like a good man. Do you think he is a better one now ?"

"How can I tell, my daughter ?" he answered, beginning to be painfully perplexed, and not knowing exactly how to evade the questions which he had promised not to answer.

"Did you ask him to come to Hopedale, and pay you and me a visit ?"

"No, I did not."

"Now, Uncle John, I wonder that you did not ; because you are generally so kind to everybody, and Mr. George has so few friends. I wish that I could see him again, for I always liked him, although you did not. He was very kind to me—and then,

besides, you remember that he told me I was both a comfort and a pleasure to him. If I come over some day, will you write him a letter for me? I will tell you what to say."

"Yes, Agnes," Uncle John answered, abstractedly; "I will write for you when you wish it."

When he was ready to go, he led Agnes back to the organ; and then she had begun to play, he motioned Grace to follow him. When they were out of hearing of the child, he told her in as few words as possible the story of George Cameron. When he had finished, he said:

"Agnes must not know anything of this, for I am pledged not to tell her. He himself requested it. The only softness that he evinced at all, was in his unwillingness that the innocent, blind child should know his present condition and circumstances. He wishes her still to know him only as 'her steamer friend.'"

To Uncle John's great surprise, Grace was much more overcome by his story than had been either of George Cameron's sisters. With a deep groan she sank into the nearest chair, and covering her face with her hands, trembled violently. Uncle John asked anxiously:

"What is the matter, Grace?"

She neither moved nor spoke. He tried to raise her up, and said:

"You are trembling like a leaf. It is too cold for you here. Go back to the fire."

"Oh, no!" she answered, with a shudder, "not there! Not where Agnes is!"

Uncle John said no more, but watched her some minutes in silent amazement. Presently she sprang up suddenly, and stood before him, her face perfectly white and rigid.

"Uncle John," she said, "will you do me a favor?"

"Yes, Grace. You need not have asked the question."

"Will you take Agnes to-morrow to Richmond, and keep her there until—until—until it is all over? He wants to see her, and, under the circumstances, I have no right to deny the father the privilege of seeing his child."

Uncle John staggered and reeled, and only saved himself from falling by grasping a chair. He passed his hand over his forehead and looked around dreamily and vacantly, so stupefied with amazement that he did not know where he was, or what he did.

Grace waited for a reply, but receiving none, she asked again:

"Will you do it, Uncle John?"

"Do what, Grace?" he asked, looking at her with a vacant stare. "What is it that I must do? Am I dreaming?"

"No, Uncle John, you are not dreaming, nor am I. Would to God I were!"

"Well, tell me,—what do you mean?"

"I only mean to ask you, if you will add one more to the many kindnesses that you have done my child, and take her to see her father before—before he dies."

"Do you mean to say that you are George Cameron's wife,—that Agnes is his child?"

"Yes, I mean it all. Ask no more now. Some day when I can, I will tell you all. You will take Agnes to-morrow?"

"Yes."

He grasped her hand, looked one moment earnestly into her face, rushed out of the house, and was gone.

It was only when he found himself at home trying to collect his scattered thoughts that he remembered all, and even then he could not convince himself that it was reality. No wonder that in the tumult and chaos of his thoughts Uncle John should have believed that he was dreaming! No wonder that he could not realize that in Grace, the gentle friend of his old age, he had found the child-angel, the comforter of his youth; and that in his love for the blind child, the granddaughter of Lucy Ellsworth, he should have found the compensation for his early disappointment! He remembered the old man, his guest, dying within speaking distance of the child whom he had so long looked for in vain. He thought of George Cameron, about to die a felon's death within reach of the wife whom he had once loved, then deserted, then sought again, and against whom he had finally become embittered, while all these years she had quietly lived near his father's home, and, together with her blind child, had been admitted as a friend within that home-circle which, in the waywardness of youth, he had left forever in a voluntary exile. No wonder that Uncle John sprang from his chair and walked hastily up and down the room, to assure himself that he was indeed awake.

When Grace returned to the parlor, she threw herself into Agnes's little chair and covered her face with her hands. She rapidly reviewed the events of her past life, of which sorrow and disappointment had made so large a part, and wondered, as she had often done before, why it was that she needed such sore chastening. This was the crowning sorrow, the one in comparison with which all the rest seemed as nothing. She remembered the husband of her youth, the man upon whom she had lavished all the affection of her young heart, and though she had

felt for years that her love for him was all dead, still he was her husband, the father of her child, and his ignominy and disgrace stung her to her inmost soul. She had borne desertion; under it, her heart had withered silently and without complaint. Now she writhed and groaned under this heavier chastening, this intolerable sorrow. Her only relief was the thought that Agnes was happily unconscious of the dishonored name bequeathed her by the crime of her wretched father. And while her heart ached, and her face wore an expression of deepest suffering, the child played on, a sweet, soothing strain, too soft and low to be heard amid the wild tumult of thoughts, memories, and feelings in her mother's heart. The music ceased, but Grace knew it not. Presently Agnes asked :

“Was that sweet, mother?”

The question was unheard and unanswered; and Grace was only roused when an outstretched, wandering hand rested upon her head.

“What is the matter, mother? Are you crying?”

“No, my child.”

“Well, you are troubled, for your voice says so. What is it, mother?”

And now came the struggle. Grace was to propose to Agnes a visit to her father, and gain her consent, without disclosing to her either his name, circumstances, or relation to herself, and this was to be done without betraying by word or tone that she knew aught of the stranger except that he had been interested in and kind to her child. It was not the first successful effort that she had made in her life to keep the cloud which shadowed her own heart from deepening the blindness of the child, but never before had it cost her such a struggle.

“Agnes,” she said, in a voice that trembled in spite of all her efforts, “you are looking pale and thin as you did before Uncle John took you away last spring, and I want to send you off again.”

“Oh, mother, not to Paris!” exclaimed the child, piteously.

“No, my daughter, not Paris, but only to Richmond, where you can go in a day and a half.”

“What for, mother? Indeed, I would rather not. It does not give me pleasure, as it does other children, to travel. I cannot see, and I am all the time afraid that I will be lost, or that something will run over me, and I am never quiet and contented unless I hold somebody's hand. I am safe and happy at home with you; please, mother, don't send me away.”

“I will not force you to go, my child. Uncle John proposes to go with you; you will only be away from me a few days, and

you know that he will take as good care of you as I can. If you go, Agnes, you will have the pleasure of seeing your—your friend, Mr. George. Would you not like that?"

"Very much, but I would rather that he should come here to see me. Suppose you write and ask him."

"That would be useless, Agnes. A soldier cannot leave the army to make a visit whenever he chooses. You seem to like him so much, that I should suppose you would be glad to meet him again, especially as he particularly desires it."

"And so I would, mother; and if I were not blind, I should like nothing better than to go to Richmond with Uncle John. And even as it is, if he were sick or in trouble, and I could do him any good, I would gladly go; but if Mr. George is well, and in camp with so many soldiers, he cannot need the company of a blind child. He only sent me that message because he thought that I would be pleased to know that he remembered me, but I don't believe that he intended or expected me to come and see him, do you?"

"Perhaps not, but he said that it would gratify him. However, you need not think any more about it, for you shall not go unless you are perfectly willing. I thought that a visit of a few days with Uncle John would be both pleasant and beneficial to you, and I mentioned your friend as another inducement for you to go."

"But, mother, why do you want me to go to Richmond? Mr. George is not there, for Uncle John saw him in camp with Dr. Charles and Mr. Walter."

"He went to Richmond, Agnes, while Uncle John was in camp."

Agnes did not give her consent, but her mother said no more, for she was persuaded that Uncle John's influence, added to what she had already said, would decide the matter. Grace was worn out and exhausted and longed to be alone, that without restraint her burdened heart might relieve itself. Agnes went to bed and was soon enjoying the sweet sleep of childhood, happily blind alike to the cloud upon her mother's face and her mother's heart.

The next morning, as Grace had foreseen, a single earnest request from Uncle John decided Agnes to accompany him to Richmond. She had been taught by her mother never for one moment to weigh her own inclinations against the wishes of him who had done so much for her; and now, whatever objections she might have had, he did not know them, for she acquiesced at once in the arrangement. At twelve o'clock they left for Richmond.

"Don't tell her that she is going to see her father," said Grace. "I earnestly hope that he will not tell her himself. I have suffered enough for both. I trust that he will have mercy on his blind child, and spare her."

"Have you any message for him, Grace?"

"None," she answered.

There was a moment's pause, and then, speaking as if each word cost a pang, she said:

"Uncle John, my love for him was a long time dying, and the struggle nearly cost me my life; but it is dead now, dead, dead!"

Again she paused; and presently she added, with a start:

"No, I have no message. The child is sufficient, and if—and if he should doubt her identity, this will prove it."

She placed in his hand a letter, yellow with age, saying:

"You need not give it unless he seems to doubt. I would not inflict unnecessary pain."

She grasped his hand, and said, with emotion:

"God bless you, Uncle John, for the kindness that never fails me. May He reward you; I never can. From you, the stranger, I have met with that sympathy and kindness which I ought to have received from others, upon whom I had a stronger claim."

She turned away, and hurried off, without waiting to hear Uncle John's answer.

"Not so much of a stranger, Grace, as we have both thought all along; nor does the obligation rest alone upon you. My debt of gratitude goes farther back, even beyond your recollection, and the old man's kindness can never repay the blessing and benefit conferred by the child!"

The day was cold, the road rough, and their horse by no means the best; and after an hour's riding Agnes began to be tired.

"How long, Uncle John, before we get to the railroad?"

"We will not take the cars before to-morrow morning, Agnes. We will have to spend to-night at a station, not many miles from home. Don't you know that the Yankees have torn up the road?"

"Yes, sir, I know it; but I cannot imagine why they did it."

"Because it is Southern property, and its destruction would injure Southern people. For the same reason they took my horses, and Mr. Cameron's, and burned up his barns and his meat."

"I wish that they had left the railroad, Uncle John. The cars are so much pleasanter than a buggy, especially when it is so cold."

Uncle John saw that she was shivering, so he checked the horse, and wrapped the buffalo robe closely around her feet, and spread a blanket over her lap.

"Now," he said, "you will be warm and comfortable in a few minutes, and perhaps, if I try to entertain you, you will forget that you are jolting along over a rough, disagreeable road. Let us see. You know my child-angel, Agnes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember, a long time ago, when I first told you all about her, that I said I wondered what kind of a woman she had grown to be; and that if she had fulfilled the promise of her childhood, I would like so much to find her, and live with her the rest of my life? Do you recollect it all, Agnes?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, hastily; "and I remember, too, that you promised, Uncle John, never to leave me, even if you should find her. Don't you remember?" she added, anxiously.

He did not answer her question, but only replied:

"I have found her, Agnes."

She started, with an expression of pain, as if some dire calamity had overtaken her. She was silent a few moments, and then exclaimed, in a tone of mingled doubt and apprehension:

"But you are not going to live with her, Uncle John?"

"I trust so, my daughter, all the rest of my life."

He was thinking less of Agnes at that moment than of her mother, and had quite forgotten her invincible jealousy of his affection for this child. He was first made conscious of the effect of his words, by a burst of tears, as she exclaimed, reproachfully, and almost passionately:

"But you promised, Uncle John, you promised that you would never leave me! Your child-angel can see, and does not need you; but I am blind, and cannot do without you. What will become of me when you are gone?"

"I am not gone, my daughter, nor am I going. I still intend to take care of you, as long as I live, just as I have done these many years."

"Are you going to Richmond to see her?"

"No, Agnes; but even if I were, you need not be jealous of my love for her. She is no longer a child. You must remember that Uncle John is now an old man, and she is now a woman as old as your mother."

"I am glad of that," she replied, with evident relief. "I had forgotten that. I always think of her as a little girl, like myself."

"She can never come between you and Uncle John's heart, Agnes; and if she had her choice this moment, she would much

rather that he should be kind and affectionate to you than to herself."

"Who told you where she was, Uncle John?"

"Her father."

"And where did you see him?"

"Do you remember the old soldier, who died at my house last summer, that I used to tell you about?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was her father; and he told me something just before he died that has enabled me to find her. But I never found out, until last night, who she was, and where she lived."

"And who is she, Uncle John?" she asked, as if anxious, and yet half reluctant to know.

"Her name is Grace, and she lives in Hopedale, and has a little blind daughter named Agnes."

"Oh, Uncle John, Uncle John!" exclaimed the delighted child, "I am so glad, so happy!"

He drew her up close to him, and could plainly feel the quick beatings of her glad heart.

Her surprise and pleasure kept her silent for several minutes; and then she asked, suddenly:

"Didn't you say just now that her father told you? You don't mean, Uncle John, that the sick old man at your house was my mother's father?"

"Yes, her father, and your grandfather."

"Then why didn't he tell us so, Uncle John?"

"Because he did not know it himself. He would have given all the world to have found you before he died."

"But why didn't he know?"

"Because he was a sailor a great many years of his life, and lived on the ocean, so that he never saw your mother after he sent her away on the ship where I first knew her. After she grew to be a woman, he went to the town where he thought that she lived, but she was gone, nobody knew where, and he tried for a long while to find her, but never could."

"But, Uncle John, what made her go away without telling anybody where she was going, and why did she not write to her father and tell him where she intended to live?"

Uncle John felt that he was rapidly approaching delicate ground, and that he had already inadvertently aroused an insatiable childish curiosity. He was greatly perplexed. To refuse a reply, would only sharpen the curiosity which he wished to allay, and so he thought it best to give an indifferent answer, and then beat as hasty a retreat as possible from the dangerous subject. So he replied:

"Her father was sailing about in a ship all round the world, and she did not know where to send a letter to him. And besides, she had already written him several, and having received no answer, she thought that perhaps he was dead, and so she did not write any more."

Without waiting for another question, Uncle John now changed the subject, and although several times during the afternoon her thoughts were evidently returning to it again, he adroitly prevented its renewal.

The next evening they arrived in Richmond, and Uncle John found that George Cameron's case had been tried that day, but the decision was not yet made known to the public. He himself was satisfied what it would be, and was therefore not surprised to hear, that night, that he had been condemned to a speedy execution, and that two more days would complete his earthly life.

Uncle John was personally known to some of the authorities at Richmond, and through their influence obtained access to the prisoner, a favor which could not be refused when he made known the object of his mission.

The next morning early he went alone to the prisoner's cell. He was, of course, greatly surprised to see his unexpected visitor, nor could Uncle John quite decide, from his manner, whether the surprise was an agreeable or an unwelcome one. There was more of coldness and hardness in his present greeting than there had been in his farewell a few days before, but there was none of that positive repugnance and aversion which he had manifested during the greater part of their former interview.

Instead of rejecting his offered hand, as Uncle John almost expected him to do, he took it kindly, and said:

"I did not expect another visit from you, sir. I thought that we had parted for the last time in this world."

"And so did I, George," replied Uncle John, sorrowfully. "Since I can give you neither comfort nor benefit, believe me that I would not voluntarily have repeated the pain of that other parting. This interview is none of my seeking. I come, at the request of your wife, to bring to you, before you die, your daughter and hers."

His chains alone prevented his start of surprise from becoming a leap. At first he did not answer. He was dumb with amazement; but in a little while the frown upon his brow deepened into a furrow, and his eye gleamed with passion, as he exclaimed, angrily:

"Thou liest, by Heaven, old man! Did you not yourself ask me, only two days ago, who and where my wife was, and give me your reasons for asking these questions? Now you come to me

professing to bring my child, who has been sent by my wife! Methinks you must take me for both boy and dotard. The other day you catechised me like the one, now you would cheat me as if I were the other! Would to God you could let me die in peace, without raking up all the torturing memories of my whole life to haunt me at its close!"

"God forbid," replied Uncle John, solemnly, "that I should add to the torture which you now bear! I repeat, that I would not willingly have intruded myself upon you now; but under the circumstances I could not refuse your wife's request."

"And pray where did you so unexpectedly find my wife and child?"

"In Hopedale, where I have known them for years; but never, until since I saw you, as the wife and child of George Cameron."

"In Hopedale!" he repeated, sneeringly and bitterly. "And so my father and his family have helped to separate me from my wife and child! Doubtless, they thought that the boy who could not appreciate such home-ties as they had offered him, would not be fitted, as a man, to take care of his own wife and child! I doubt not they have done it much better than I could, and I owe them much for having relieved me of the trouble!"

The scorn and bitterness with which he spoke were absolutely intolerable to Uncle John, and it required a great effort for him to control himself sufficiently to reply calmly.

"You do them gross injustice, George. Unless your wife has herself told them, since I left Hopedale, of her relationship to you, your father and sisters are still ignorant of it."

"She must have learned to keep a secret," he answered, "better than most of her sex, if she has lived years, as you say, in the neighborhood of my father's family, and has never by word or look betrayed her connection with them."

"It may be remarkable, but it is nevertheless true. For years, your father and sisters have loved her as a dear friend, without suspecting that she was more; and her child could not have been dearer to them, if they had known the closeness of the tie that bound her to them."

"If not to seek their aid and countenance, will you please to tell me why she should have selected their home as hers?"

"That question she must herself answer. I cannot. I know nothing of the history of her past life, except what I have heard from yourself and her father. Though our intercourse has for years been in all other respects without reserve, yet she has never made the slightest allusion to her past life."

"And what of my daughter? What is she like?"

"You are the best judge of that. She is the blind child whom

you met upon the steamer; the only friend, as you yourself acknowledged, that you had made for years."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet and severed his chains, George Cameron could not have been more astounded. He sat for a little while in blank amazement; and when by degrees he began to comprehend the full meaning of Uncle John's words, he suddenly pulled his hat down over his eyes and wept like a child. After awhile he said, hurriedly :

"Where is she? Why did you not bring her with you?"

"I thought it best, George, to prepare you for the interview; and I am very glad that she has not witnessed this. We, her friends, like to spare her everything like sorrow. Her life is dark enough at best; we only tell her what will lighten it, and give her as much sunshine as possible."

"You are right, sir. And does she know who it is that she is coming to see?"

"She knows nothing, except that she is coming to see her friend, Mr. George, and thinks that she has come in accordance with your expressed anxiety to see her again. I delivered your message, and nothing more, just as you requested. You are the proper person to tell her the rest if you think best."

The prisoner's whole frame shook with emotion, as he exclaimed in a tone that went to the heart of his listener :

"I would give, oh! I would give years of my wasted life for the blessed privilege of clasping my daughter to my heart, and telling her that I am her erring but repentant father, of asking and receiving from those childish lips, before I die, full and free forgiveness for the wrong which she is too innocent to appreciate! But no," he added, touchingly, "it must not be—and I deserve it all. To her pure heart the knowledge that she had such a father, and that he had caused so much misery to the mother whom she idolizes, would be a blindness of the heart deeper and more intolerable than that of her eyes. I will spare her. She shall only know me as the friend of her brief voyage, and for her sake I will deny myself the only comfort that is left me now. It seems a small reparation for past wrongs; but God only knows the sacrifice that it costs."

The hard and unrelenting man was at last overcome. He had been inaccessible to the offices of friendship, and had received all such offers with a sneer or with cold indifference. He had heard, without a pang of remorse, of his childhood's home, and had had no kind message for those whom, without cause, he had forsaken in his youth. He had even uttered no word of regret for the trusting heart whose happiness he had blighted, and had spoken with carelessness and levity of the fearful doom to which he was

hastening; but callous as he was to all other influences, he was at last broken down by the thought of his little blind child, and the repentance which nothing else could wring from him flowed unbidden at the recollection of her wrongs.

All at once a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and already half ashamed that a stranger should have been witness to his unusual emotion, he looked up, and fastened upon Uncle John's face a deep, earnest gaze, as if he would read his heart.

Apparently he was satisfied with the scrutiny, and said, thoughtfully:

"You are, you must be telling the truth, for your face speaks it; and yet it would be a comfort to have some assurance, some proof that she is indeed my child."

"Will this satisfy you?" replied Uncle John, placing in his hand the letter that Grace had given him.

He opened it, and recognized in an instant those youthful vows of life-long devotion, all of which he had broken. It was a mute but a powerful reproach, and as such, it stung him to the soul. He trembled visibly as he gave it back, and said, half in anger and half in sorrow:

"This is indeed sufficient. It is a double-edged sword that she has used to avenge herself! Methinks she might have found some other proof equally convincing and less keen in its edge."

"I know nothing of the contents of the letter, George; but this much I know, she never designed to inflict unnecessary pain. This is not in keeping with her character. Grace did not intend to torture, but to convince, and she gave me what she said would be sufficient proof if you should require it."

"Did you call her Grace?" he asked. "That is not her name. Her maiden name was Mary Middleton. But go, sir," he added, impatiently, "we are wasting time, and minutes are precious. Go and bring my child to me."

"Farewell, George Cameron," said Uncle John, extending his hand. "I will not again intrude upon you during the brief time that you have to spend with Agnes. Farewell; may God forgive you and have mercy upon your soul!"

"Farewell, sir," he answered, feelingly. "Thank you for this kindness at the close of a life which has had but little; but, perhaps, that little was more than it deserved!"

He still held Uncle John's hand, and there was a slight tremor in his voice, as he asked:

"Am I only to see her once?"

"As often as you please."

"How long are you authorized to keep her here?"

"Just as long as you want her."

"This is Wednesday. To-morrow is Thursday, and then Friday."

He paused, and his face was very pale, as he added :

"I shall not need her after to-morrow. Let her spend this afternoon with me, and all day to-morrow, if she is willing to stay."

"She will scarcely need any other persuasion than the assurance that it will give you pleasure. I will go and bring her at once."

George Cameron's whole frame shook nervously, as he saw Uncle John leading Agnes into his cell. Her hand was stretched out before her, as it always was when she was in a strange place, and it very nearly came in contact with the irons upon his wrist.

"Confound these things," he muttered, "they will betray me !"

"Where are you, Mr. George?" she asked.

He grasped her hand without speaking, and pressed a kiss upon her lips, so full of strong, passionate feeling, that the child was astonished.

"Agnes," said Uncle John, "I am going out now for a little while, but I will not go far away. Whenever you want me I will come."

"Very well, Uncle John," she answered, cheerfully. "When Mr. George and I get tired of each other, I will call you. It will seem like being on the steamer again, for me to be talking to Mr. George, only that the air here is not fresh and sweet as it was on the ocean."

It was several minutes before George Cameron felt that he was sufficiently master of himself to speak. It completely unmanned him to look upon that childish face, and to think of the double claim which her blindness and helplessness gave her upon a father's protecting care and love. But while she had not found that parental care where she had a right to expect it, it was still very evident that she had not felt the want of it. There was none of the sadness of orphanage upon that blind face, and while the thought that his child had never needed him was full of bitterness, yet there was a melancholy satisfaction mingled with it, when he remembered that his neglected duty had not helped to darken her life.

Had Agnes been more accustomed to his voice, she would at once have detected the unnatural constraint in his tone, as he said :

"Agnes, it was very kind in you to leave your mother and come so far to see a stranger,—one, too, who has never been able to make himself agreeable to a child of your age."

"I was willing to come, Mr. George," she answered, "when

Uncle John told me that you wanted to see me very much; but I would a great deal rather that you should have come to see me. I am happier at home, with mother, than I can be anywhere else, and I wanted her to write and ask you to come and see me; but she told me that you could not come, for a soldier cannot leave the army whenever he pleases. I don't know about your being agreeable to other children, but you always were to me; and you know that on the steamer I liked to talk to you better than anybody else, except Uncle John."

"Yes, Agnes, you were always kind to me, and I have thought many times, since we parted, of the little blind child who had given me so much comfort."

"And I, too, have thought many times of what you used to tell me about your feeling better after you had talked to me. Do you know, Mr. George, that you are the first person to whom I was ever really useful? You don't know how much I like to think of this. You, who have eyes, and can always be doing good to somebody, cannot imagine how pleasant it is for a blind child, who has never been able to do anything for others, to be told that she has been useful even to one single person."

"You, who can always be doing good to somebody!" What a reproach to the unhappy father coming from the lips of his unconscious child! He felt it in his inmost soul, and with difficulty stifled the groan that struggled to his lips. He was thankful that he was not compelled to dissimulate with his face as well as with voice and words, as he answered:

"Perhaps, Agnes, you underrate your usefulness. I doubt not but you have done quite as much to promote the happiness of your friends as other children have, who can see. What, for instance, would your—your mother and Uncle John do without you?"

"They would be very lonely, sir, and would miss me very much; but only because I occupy so much of their time and thoughts; not because I have ever been useful to them."

"Agnes," said the prisoner, abruptly, his face working convulsively, "your—your mother, is she happy?"

"Certainly, sir," she replied, "my mother is happy. She is good, and good people are always happy."

"I am not so sure of that, my child. I have known some very good people who had a great deal of trouble to make them sad."

"And so my mother has often told me that she has had. They say, too, that she always looks sad; but may not sad people be happy?"

"No, Agnes, it seems to me a contradiction in terms."

"Perhaps so, sir; I don't know much about such things; but I thought that people were sad when God afflicted them, and unhappy when they did wrong. Now, my mother is a Christian. She always tries to do right, and so she cannot be unhappy, although she may sometimes be sad."

"You are a singular child. Who taught you such notions?"

"Nobody taught me, but I must have learned them from mother and Uncle John, Mr. Derby and Mr. Cameron, Miss Julia and Eva, for they are my only companions."

"Miss Julia, Miss Eva!" he repeated, thoughtfully. "Agnes, do you love these ladies very much? You mention them very often."

"Do I love them?" she repeated, in surprise. "What a question! But I forgot, you don't know them, Mr. George. If you did, you never would have asked it. Indeed, I do love them very dearly, and I should be a most ungrateful child if I did not."

"They are kind to you, then?"

"Yes, sir, just as kind and affectionate as if they were my own sisters."

"Is Eva pretty? But I forgot, you cannot see."

"Yes, sir, mother says that she is very pretty, and I am sure that she must be, for she has such a bright, glad voice, and such a ringing laugh, and long, thick curls. Yes, we all think that Eva is beautiful, and somebody else does, too, and that is Mr. Willie."

"And who is he, Agnes?"

"A young soldier, who was wounded at Manassas, and brought to the hospital in Hopedale; and when he was well enough to be moved, they took him out to the Hall, where Miss Julia nursed him for months; and now he is nearly well, and he and Eva are going to be married."

"What!" he exclaimed, in his surprise thrown completely off his guard. "Going to be married! When I last——"

He suddenly checked himself, and forced himself to ask, quietly:

"How old is she? Is she not very young to be married?"

"I don't know, sir. She is seventeen, and she must be old enough, or her father would not have consented. And, besides, they are not going to be married now. Mr. Cameron wants them to wait until the war is over, but Uncle John does not think that they will be able to do it."

The child's words were altogether unheeded by her companion, for memory was busy picturing, with all the vividness of present

reality, that last scene at home so many years ago. How well he remembered the little group under the oak-tree; how plainly he saw the curly-headed Eva, half amazed and half terrified, the enraged Walter holding in one hand his dandelion curl, and doubling up his other fist ready for the expected combat; and last of all, the indignant little Julia standing as a shield between him and his victim! And that well-remembered willow twig; ah! its memory lashed him now with a keener sting than it had then inflicted on that childish face, and the bright-red mark across her cheek was as painfully vivid as when she had stood before him, quivering with mingled pain and anger.

Agnes waited long for a reply, and then said:

"Are you thinking, Mr. George?"

"Yes, my daughter," he answered, sadly. "I was thinking—thinking."

She instantly detected the alteration in his tone, and asked:

"Are you sad, Mr. George?"

He thought that, according to her definition of terms, he might be called not sad, but unhappy; and perceiving that he must guard his tone as well as his words, and determined not to betray himself, he replied, with an attempt at cheerfulness:

"No, indeed, Agnes, not sad to-day. I have too good company for that."

"Mr. George," she said, "I was so glad when Uncle John told me that you were a soldier."

"Why so, child?"

"For several reasons. You told me when I first knew you that you had no friends and nothing to do. Now in the army you will have both, and what is better still, you will be happy in doing your duty to your country, by fighting and helping to drive away these miserable Yankees."

The father became restless. He did not like the subject, but was afraid to excite her suspicion by seeming to avoid it, and he replied, in a careless, indifferent tone:

"Why, Agnes, don't you like the Yankees?"

In other circumstances he would have been amused at the expression of blank amazement upon her face, and he listened without surprise, as she answered, coldly:

"Now, Mr. George, if I did not know that you wanted to tease me as Uncle John does sometimes, I would get right up and go away, and would not say another word to you; but of course you cannot love the Yankees any better than I do, or you would not be fighting against them. Now, if you knew my friends in Hopedale, and loved them as I do, you would fight all the harder in the next battle, for what they did to them."

"What did they do?"

"They actually burned up Mr. Cameron's barns full of grain, and all his meat, and stole all his horses and mules, except a few old useless ones, so that he cannot make another crop next year, and does not know where he is to get food for his servants now."

Her listener grew more and more disturbed. He dared not stop the child, but he did not answer, hoping that she would soon grow weary of the subject; but she was evidently excited, and talked rapidly and with far more bitterness of feeling than he had ever seen her show before. Little dreaming that the subject could be objectionable to a Confederate soldier, as she supposed him to be, she went on:

"When they first arrived at the Hall, Mr. Cameron was not there. Miss Julia and Eva, two unprotected young ladies, were the only persons at home, and yet these soldiers, with a lieutenant at their head, searched the house from top to bottom. They even went in the ladies' bureau-drawers, and Eva's writing-desk, and the officer read Willie's letter to her before her eyes. He pretended that he was searching for a Confederate soldier; but when he found the silver spoons and forks, he showed what he really came for, by putting them into his pocket. What do you think of that, Mr. George? What do you think of a soldier, an officer, stealing silver spoons?"

He did not reply, and presently she compelled an answer, by repeating her question.

"Say, Mr. George, what do you think of that?"

"I think, Agnes, that the whole proceeding was a villainous one; but do you think that it is fair to judge a whole army by two or three soldiers, or all its officers by one? Perhaps in your—in the Confederate army some might be found no better than these."

"Now, Mr. George!" she exclaimed, half angrily, "are you going to put our soldiers and our officers on a level with such people as these? You are not talking pleasantly, now," she added, with the candor which, in consideration of her infirmity, she had always been privileged to use. "I don't like to hear you talk so at all."

"Well, my child," he answered, "it will surely not be difficult to find more pleasant things to talk about. The subject, Agnes, was not of my choosing; it was yours."

"It is not the subject, Mr. George, that I find fault with; it is the way that you talk about it. Of course you do not mean it; but it sounds like excusing them. Now, if you were a Yankee, you might say so, for nobody would expect you to be any better

than the rest of them; but you are no Yankee. Didn't you tell me on the steamer that you belong to my State, Virginia?"

"Yes, I am a Virginian."

"Well, then," she said, very decidedly, "you ought to be the last man in the world to say anything that sounds like excusing the Yankees for what they have done and are now doing in your own State,—burning property, stealing cattle, and destroying railroads."

"Agnes," he said, amused even in the midst of his depression and gloom, "you are the most incorrigible little rebel that I ever saw."

"I don't like to be called a rebel, Mr. George. It is a Yankee name."

"Do you like Secesh better?"

"No, I abhor that; for they call us that to show their contempt for us. I like to be called a Southerner, which is just what I am."

"Somebody has indoctrinated you thoroughly, Agnes. Who is it,—your mother?"

"What do you mean by that, Mr. George?"

"I mean that somebody has made you a fierce, hot Southerner. Who did it?"

"God," she answered, reverently. "He had me born in the South, and I can no more help loving my country, and getting angry when I see it ruined and desolated, than I could help loving my mother, and getting angry if I saw her tormented and abused."

Every word that the child uttered was a home-thrust, which pierced only the deeper because she did it so unconsciously. The father felt them all, and yet he could not resist an unaccountable temptation to draw out her feelings to the utmost extent; and so he said:

"Agnes, if such are your feelings toward a real Yankee, who invades your Southern country, what would they be toward a Southern Yankee?"

"What is that, Mr. George? I never heard of such a thing."

"It is a man who is a Southerner by birth, but a Yankee in feeling; who either joins the Yankee army, or believes that it is right in desolating and ruining the Southern country."

"A man to join an army for invading and desolating his own country, or believe that such a thing is right!" she exclaimed, with horror and amazement. "Oh, Mr. George, I don't believe that such a villain as that is in the world!"

"Oh, Agnes!" he exclaimed, involuntarily, "don't say that."

"Yes I will!" she replied, in a most excited manner. "I

don't believe that anybody who had a man's heart could be wicked enough for that!"

"What would you do, Agnes, if you were to meet such a person?"

"Loathe and scorn him!" she answered, "and keep far from him, as I would from a viper!"

Her whole face expressed unutterable loathing, and even her sightless eyes seemed to flash with indignation. Involuntarily her listener tried to shrink away, as if he felt the glance of her burning scorn; but presently he remembered, with a feeling of relief, that she could not see the object of her contempt, and he murmured, inaudibly:

"Better as it is! Ignorance is bliss for you, my child. I would not plant such a sting in your young heart, even for a thousandfold greater pleasure than it would give me now to tell you all! No; you shall know me only as your friend!"

"What did you say, Mr. George?" she asked. "I did not hear you."

"Nothing, my child, nothing. Now tell me something about your home and your mother."

Frankly and unsuspectingly she told him of her mother, and disclosed many things in her past and present history which caused a pang, and wrung forth a sigh from her listener. It was almost dark when Uncle John came to say that it was time to go.

"You will come back to-morrow, Agnes, and see me?" the father said.

"Why cannot you come to see me?" she asked. "Our rooms at the hotel are pleasanter than yours. It is damp and close here."

"I cannot come to you, Agnes. Don't you know that your mother told you a soldier could not leave his post and go away whenever he pleased?"

"Yes, sir; but you cannot be very busy, or you would not have had time to talk so long to me now."

"No, I am not very busy, but a soldier is obliged to obey orders, and ask no questions. I have been ordered to stay here, and I must do so, no matter how much I would like to take a walk or pay a visit."

"Well, Mr. George, if that is the case, I will come to see you again to-morrow morning, if Uncle John will bring me."

It required all the prisoner's dexterity and watchfulness to prevent the clanking of his chains, and to keep his fettered hands from coming in contact with hers, as he clasped her in a tight embrace.

On their return to the hotel, she asked:

"When are you going home, Uncle John?"

"Day after to-morrow morning, Agnes."

"Will your business all be finished then?"

"Yes; and I shall be very glad to get home again. Won't you?"

"Yes, sir; I love home better than any other place,—Paris, or Richmond, or any place."

The next day she spent with the prisoner. Their conversation was almost exclusively about the families at the cottage and the Hall, and sometimes he felt a longing desire to send some message to both households; but this would involve a betrayal of himself to Agnes, and besides, there was still a lurking bitterness in his heart, which made all such feelings only momentary. There was but one soft spot there, and that Agnes had found and wholly appropriated. To wife, and father, and sisters he was still perfectly indifferent.

As the day began to wane, the last day of his earthly life, he became so oppressed and dejected that it required a great effort to talk at all, and sometimes there was a pause of several minutes in the conversation. After one of these, he said, sadly:

"Agnes, you are going away to-morrow, and I do not feel as if I would ever see you again."

"Oh, Mr. George, you must not say that. Some time you must get a furlough, and come to Hopedale to see me, and then you shall know and learn to love my mother, and the family at the Hall, and shall never say again that you have no friends. You must promise to come; will you?"

"Yes, if it should ever be possible."

"But why may it not be possible?"

"You know, Agnes, that a soldier's life is very uncertain. Mine may not be a long one."

"Yes, perhaps so; but that is not certain, and a soldier ought not to expect to be killed. He ought to do his duty, and hope that God will spare him to do something great for his country. That is what mother told Mr. Walter when he went away."

The prisoner's answer was a sigh, which almost amounted to a groan. After a little while, he said:

"You will promise, my child, not to forget me."

"Yes, sir, I will promise never to forget you, and always to love you too."

"Thank you, my darling, thank you!" he answered with grateful earnestness.

"And will you promise, Mr. George, to come to Hopedale?"

"Yes, if I can."

"And if I write to you, or rather if I get mother to do it for me, will you answer the letter?"

"Yes, Agnes, if I should ever receive it."

The child was gone. He had strained her passionately to his heart, in a last embrace, and had sent her away forever from her father's presence as from the presence of a stranger. He listened to her retreating footsteps, and when they were lost in the distance, the wretched man sank upon the floor and sobbed like a child.

The next morning Uncle John went again to the prison. He did not go in, but simply inquired of the guard if the execution was over.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "it took place at nine o'clock."

At eleven he and Agnes were in the cars, on their way to Hopedale.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE morning after Uncle John and Agnes had gone to Richmond, Grace walked out to the Hall. The walk was too long for her at any time, and she had never undertaken it but once before, and then under strong excitement. Julia saw her as she entered the gate, and immediately conjecturing that something was wrong, she hastened to meet her half way down the lawn.

"What is the matter, Grace?" she exclaimed, as she saw her haggard face and flagging steps.

She replied by asking:

"Is your father at home, Julia? I must see him alone."

When they reached the house, her strength gave way, and she sank exhausted upon the steps. Julia was now both alarmed and distressed. She saw that something very unusual was the matter, for she knew Grace well enough to be assured that only an intolerable trouble could thus overcome her.

"You are sick and in trouble," she said, anxiously. "What must I do for you?"

"Only take me to your father, Julia."

Julia half led, half supported her to the library, where her father was alone.

Mr. Cameron saw at once that she was greatly agitated, and there was even more of kindness and gentleness than usual in his greeting. They sat several minutes in silence, he waiting for her

to speak, and she trying to nerve herself to do it. At last, in a few words, she told him the mystery of her life, and gave him convincing proof that the unknown stranger, whom the kindness of years had made his friend, was none other than his daughter-in-law, and the blind child, who had been scarcely less to him than a daughter, was indeed his own grandchild.

Mr. Cameron was astounded. She had finished her story several minutes before he replied at all, and then he said, in a tone of mingled kindness and reproach:

"And why, my daughter, have you waited all these years to tell me this? Why have you toiled and struggled to support yourself and your helpless child in the very sight of a comfortable home, where there was room enough and love enough for you and her? Why have you denied me the opportunity of doing my duty to you both? And if you had determined that you and she should live independent of the care and affection of the Cameron family, why did you seek their home for your own?"

"I came to Hopedale, sir, for two reasons. One was to bring my child within reach of your protecting care if she should ever need it. I never intended to ask aid from any one so long as I had health and strength to provide for her myself, but I had no right to leave her helpless and friendless, and I always purposed to reveal myself to you in case that I should be about to die. My other reason for coming here was because I felt assured that here, under the very wing of the home which he had left in his youth, and against which, for some unknown reason, he was so embittered, I would be secure against discovery if my husband should ever attempt to find me."

"Were your feelings so bitter toward him, Grace?" asked Mr. Cameron.

"I felt, sir, that I never wanted to see him more. My love was strong, as strong and trusting as ever woman bestowed upon a husband; but, Mr. Cameron, even such love as mine can wither and die. When I first sought refuge in Hopedale, it was under strong excitement. I had not ceased to love my husband then. No, I loved him devotedly, passionately, even then; but, stung with a sense of injustice and wrong, and burning with indignation at receiving neglect and desertion where I had a right to expect love and protection, my chief anxiety was to disappoint him if he should ever try to find me again. My love died out years ago. Now I am oppressed with a sense of his degradation, but it is more on Agnes's account than on my own; it is rather because he is her father than because he is my husband."

"But, Grace, since you have thought it best to keep your secret for years, why have you revealed it now?"

"Because the reasons for secrecy no longer exist. I will never be sought now, and I have shown myself capable of taking care of myself and Agnes, and that I require nothing at your hands. On the contrary, it may be that, as daughter and sister, I can do something for you in our common calamity. When you were prosperous and happy, I cared not to cast a shadow upon you by revealing myself as the deserted wife of your erring son. All my own individual grief I have kept to myself, but this is a common grief, brought alike upon you and me by him, and as his wife it is both my duty and my right to share it with you, his father and sisters. If I can do no more, I can, at least, feel and suffer with you."

"I respect your motive, my daughter," replied Mr. Cameron, "but at the same time I must condemn your action. You have wronged both yourself and us: yourself, by being shut out from the protection and love of those upon whom, from your peculiar circumstances, you had even more than a daughter's claim; and us, by keeping us in ignorance of a duty which, had we known it, we would most gladly have fulfilled. My poor daughter," he added, looking compassionately at her, "how you must have suffered all these years, bearing your burden silently, and without sympathy!"

"That has added no little to its weight, sir," she replied. "After I learned to know you well, and especially since Julia has grown up with a heart so full of sympathy, I have often longed for the comfort of a full confession, and the restraint that I imposed upon myself was only another element in my cup of sorrow. I could have borne it better elsewhere, but for my child's sake it was better to remain here, and so I did. I have kept my secret, Mr. Cameron, but it has cost a continual effort to do it."

"Indeed, my daughter, you have kept it well, too well for your comfort and for my duty; but silence and mystery are ended now. The forsaken wife of that unfortunate boy, who began his career in disobedience and is about to end it in dishonor, shall find a father in the parent whom he abandoned, and a home beneath the roof which he deserted. Hereafter, Grace, you and Agnes shall find a home in your father's house, and be sheltered by his love and care."

She shook her head, and answered:

"No, sir, that cannot be."

"How now?" he exclaimed, almost angrily. "Am I still to be denied the privilege from which I have been so long shut out?"

"Agnes must never know," she replied, "what I have now told you."

"Now this passes comprehension," he said, impatiently. "One

would think that the child had lived long enough near her grandfather without knowing it."

"I cannot consent," she answered, quietly, "that my child should first know her father as a criminal."

"She need never know that. We can only tell her that her father is my son, and that he is dead."

"That, sir, will be impossible. George's unhappy end is no secret. If I could I would still keep her in ignorance of his name and existence, but this I cannot hope to do. Newspapers will herald his crime and his fate through the length and breadth of the land, and somebody will be sure to tell her. She will be sufficiently grieved for the sake of her friends at the Hall, she must not be grieved too on her own account. Believe me, sir, it is better, far better, that when Agnes hears the name of George Cameron, it should fall upon her ears as that of a stranger, with whom she has no further concern than to sympathize with the trouble and sorrow that he has brought upon you."

"But would it not be something of a compensation for this knowledge to find that those whom she has been accustomed to regard as friends are something more? that she is bound to them by the ties of blood, and has the strong claim of relationship upon them?"

"Agnes is nothing but a simple child, Mr. Cameron, and knows and cares little for ties of blood. Years of affectionate kindness have bound her to you by a love that no relationship could increase, and she could neither love you better herself, nor expect more affection from you, if you were a thousand times her grandfather."

"You may be right, Grace," he answered, doubtfully. "God knows that I would not do anything to make her unhappy, and yet it would be a great comfort to me to be able, without restraint, to lavish my affection upon her. I would like to compensate her now for all these lost years."

"You need not restrain your affection, sir. Lavish it upon her as fully and as freely as you will, it will not surprise her, for she has long been accustomed to it. Indeed, I think you will find it difficult to be kinder or more affectionate to her than you have been for years."

"Then, Grace, if I understand it, we must rejoice quietly in our new-found ties. The world must know nothing of them."

"Yes, sir, for the present, at least, for Agnes's sake. Mr. Derby and Uncle John already know it. Mr. Derby has known it ever since I first came to Hopedale, and I told Uncle John night before last, when I asked him to take Agnes to see her father."

"Has she gone?" he inquired, in surprise.

"Yes, sir. They left yesterday afternoon. Her father proves to be not altogether a stranger. He is the friend whose acquaintance she made on the steamer, and whom she only knows as Mr. George. As ignorant as herself, he sent a kind message to her, and expressed a wish to see her, a wish which, under the circumstances, I felt that I had no right to disregard. I feel some anxiety lest he may reveal himself to her, but I expressed no wish upon the subject. Perhaps I ought to be willing, if it will comfort him; but knowing the child as I do, I cannot help wishing to spare her the pain which this knowledge would certainly inflict. As to ourselves, let us continue outwardly our same relation as friends. The world has nothing to do with our ties and our inner life. As to happiness, there is, I suspect, as little in the future for you as there is for me, for such a blow will leave in your heart but little capacity for it, and I myself bade farewell to it years ago. But we can be as father and daughter to each other—a mutual comfort and solace."

"I cannot but acquiesce in your wishes, my daughter, however much I may doubt their expediency. One thing, however, I shall insist upon. I have consented to your terms, you must now agree to mine. If in the eyes of the world we are to be nothing more than friends, in reality it must be far otherwise. I will not be satisfied merely with the name of father; you must allow me to act a father's part. Even while ignorant of our relationship, your conduct in this particular has always been unaccountable to me. You have uniformly and consistently rejected from me kindness which you were willing to receive from others upon whom you had no stronger claim."

"But you understand it now, Mr. Cameron. So long as I kept my secret from you I resolved to be independent of you. Hereafter I shall not only desire but I shall expect to be treated as a daughter."

The sisters, equally surprised at Grace's tidings, received them with characteristic difference of opinion. Eva was bitterly opposed to having Agnes kept in ignorance. She was satisfied that the child, if she knew all, would love her much better than she could possibly do now; and as to herself, she was very sure that her intercourse with Agnes would hereafter always be restrained for fear of betraying what she was told to conceal. But Grace quietly overruled these objections, as she had done those of her father. Julia, on the contrary, coincided entirely with the mother, whose views struck an answering chord in her own feelings. She well knew what Grace meant, by the sting which would be thus planted in the child's heart, and she agreed with her that it would be an unnecessary infliction. This disclosure

revealed to her, as it had done to her father, much that had heretofore been inexplicable in Grace's conduct; for while she had evidently been for years warmly attached to them, and was always ready to perform for them the offices of friendship, there had been a quiet but a very decided way of rejecting all favors from either her father or herself, that had both surprised and annoyed her. And yet, at the same time that she had thus rejected them for herself, she had, with seeming inconsistency, not only allowed, but even encouraged Agnes to receive from them any kindness whatever. Now Julia understood it all. She could appreciate the feeling which made the mother shrink from being herself under obligations, while she permitted her daughter to receive what, as his child, she had a right to demand. She, as well as Grace, regretted that the veil of mystery must still be thrown over their connection. They would have preferred at once to have made it known, but for Agnes's sake they were willing to make the sacrifice.

When she and Uncle John returned, they found things going on in their usual calm routine at the Hall and the cottage; and if there was a little more warmth, a little more tenderness with which the grandfather pressed to his heart the blind child of his erring son, she did not know it, for she could not see the tears that he hastily brushed away, and, as her mother had foretold, she had been too long accustomed to his affection to be surprised at it now.

As Uncle John lifted her out of the buggy at her mother's door, he whispered:

"You must not tell your mother about the child-angel, Agnes. That is a secret between you and me, and nobody must tell her that except myself."

"Oh no, Uncle John," she answered, "I won't say one word about it!"

But, childlike, and bursting with the importance of keeping a secret, she exclaimed, as soon as she met her mother:

"I have had a pleasant visit, mother, and Uncle John and I know a great secret, and you will be so glad to know it some of these days; but we cannot tell you yet, can we, Uncle John?"

"No, Agnes, I rely upon you to keep it. If you mention it before I give you permission, I will never tell you another."

"Come to-night, Uncle John," said Grace, "and I will tell you all. You deserve this proof of friendship at my hands."

That night, when Agnes was dreaming pleasantly about Uncle John, his child-angel, and Mr. George, her mother was quietly and painfully unfolding the records of a life of sorrow. He listened attentively, and when she had finished he said:

"You have indeed suffered much, Grace ; but the worst is over now. The rest of your life may be at least quiet and peaceful, though it cannot be happy."

"Yes," she answered, "I know well that the worst is over now. You may not have felt it, Uncle John," she said, with sad earnestness, "but I know that when the heart is worn out by years of sorrow, or crushed by a heavy blow, there is a sort of painful satisfaction in the thought that it is dead, that never more can it bleed and suffer as it has done before. Yes, I am thankful that the worst is over now."

"I did not mean in that sense, Grace," he answered. "I do not believe that after these past years of your life your heart will be capable of what we call happiness, but it is not so dead that it cannot enjoy peace, blessed peace, rest, and quiet, after years of storm. Nor is it so dead that it will be indifferent to the kind and soothing offices of kindred and friendship. Very merciful is it that at this crisis of your life you should have access to such friends as those at the Hall, that your newly-revealed ties should bind you to hearts so full of kindness and sympathy. Had your husband's family been other than they are, their coldness or indifference might have increased the chilling desolation of your heart ; but as it is, you will find in their love a support, a comfort, which, as yet, you can scarcely realize."

"Yes, I can, Uncle John. I have known for years what a comfort it would be to me to be taken to their hearts as sister and daughter ; and had they not been just what they are, I should not have told them what they know now."

"Grace," he said, "you have surprised them by the revelation of what you are to them. You will be yourself not less amazed to find out what you are to me. Your claim upon Mr. Cameron is a strong one, upon me it is tenfold stronger ; and were I to devote the brief remnant of my life entirely to you it would be quite too short to cancel the obligation which I owe to the child-angel, whose innocence and gentle companionship recalled me from a wretched misanthropy to my better self."

Uncle John then told her the whole story. When he had finished, she exclaimed, with tears :

"Oh, Uncle John ! if you had only told me this long ago ; if you had only told me then what my poor old father said to you, he would have had the satisfaction of finding at the last hour of his life the daughter whom he had sought so long, and I would have had the mournful privilege of closing those eyes, which, as it was, were sealed by stranger hands. What would I not give to have known then what you have told me now !"

"And what would I not give if I had told you ! But you must

remember that he was absolutely dying when I heard it. But had it been otherwise, I should probably not have told you, since I little dreamed that you had ever heard more of George Cameron than his name."

"My poor, poor father!" she said, as her tears fell rapidly. "A wanderer all his life, a wanderer even to the end! Strange, indeed, was the Providence that brought him to die almost at his daughter's door, and yet denied him the privilege of that daughter's care, and left him for strangers to nurse, for strangers to bury! Ah, Uncle John! how much chastening I must have needed, how much I have received! My life, unlike that of others, has not been checkered with joy and sorrow; its only variety has been the different shades and kinds of grief. The young, unprotected daughter, patiently watching and longing for the father who never came; the forsaken wife, looking and praying for the return of the husband from whom she was separated, though she knew it not, by a chasm wider and deeper than that of death; the helpless mother, thrown out upon the world with her blind baby, in a life-long exile from all whom she had ever known, and bearing, through weary years, a sorrow which was eating out her very heart; to find herself, when she had just reached the meridian of life, the widow of a condemned traitor, and to learn that the father for whom she had waited in vain in her youth had at last died within the very sound of her voice! Oh! what other and what different kinds of sorrow can still be in reserve for me?"

Uncle John listened in silence to the sad catalogue of sorrows which she rehearsed. He had learned that in all great griefs, words are but empty sounds, and that the true secret of friendly comfort is silent sympathy. So he said not a word, but waited a little while, and then grasping her hand, said kindly:

"May God support and help you, Grace!"

He then went away and left her alone with her sorrow.

CHAPTER XXV.

TIME now dragged heavily both at the Hall and the cottage. Eva's glad voice was hushed, and her girlish heart was sobered by womanly fears and anxieties; and as she conjured up a thousand torturing fancies with regard to Willie, she sometimes remembered with surprise, and it may be with a feeling of self-

reproach too, the light-hearted carelessness with which she had once spoken of war, and the anxieties of mothers, sisters, and lovers.

Julia was, if possible, more quiet than ever. She was altered in appearance since Charles Beaufort left her, for sorrow must and will have a vent; if not in words and tears, it will reveal itself in the cheek, the eye, the step. Once she had tried to conceal her trouble, but there was no longer any need of this, for in the great calamity that had fallen upon their house there was a sufficiently apparent cause for her distress. And indeed for the present this had swallowed up all other thoughts. George and his fearful doom absorbed her mind, and if sometimes the recollection of Charles would for a moment intrude, and she remembered with a pang how completely she was severed from him now, she instantly checked the selfishness which could bring into the account her individual suffering, when her brother's crime had been so fearfully expiated, and such a blight had fallen upon the whole name and family.

"I cannot realize that to-morrow is Christmas; can you, sister?" asked Eva.

"Not now, Eva; but we will when we get into the church to-morrow."

Julia worked away industriously at the little garland of cedar and holly berries, which was designed for the portrait of her mother that hung in her father's room, and was the only thing about the house which was to wear its accustomed Christmas dress. As she twined it around the frame, the soft, gentle eyes seemed almost to smile upon her, and it was with a mingled feeling of pleasure and pain that she looked at the face so identified with her childhood: pain, at the recollection of that young brother so vividly recalled by the sight of the mother; and pleasure, as she thought that her peace could not be disturbed, as theirs was, by that brother's mournful fate.

There was, indeed, nothing in the aspect of Cameron Hall on Christmas morning to remind them of the festal day. Quiet, sad faces met each other with the accustomed "good morning," because their lips could not frame the mockery of the Christmas greeting. Their little breakfast-table was a painful contrast to the long, well-filled board, surrounded by gay and happy guests, who were wont to come to spend the happy season at Cameron Hall; the parlor was cold, cheerless, and desolate, where usually the blazing fire roared up the spacious chimney, diffusing cheerful warmth and a ruddy glow upon the assembled party; while vases looked bright and gay, filled with the evergreens and the holly, and family portraits smiled upon the guests from their

frame-work of fresh green garlands. There was, indeed, nothing at Cameron Hall now that looked like Christmas. All was cold and quiet; and as, after their unsocial meal, the father and daughters repaired in silence to the library, instead of following a gay troop of guests into the parlor, as they had done a year ago, they perhaps realized, more painfully than ever before, the change that one short year had produced in their feelings and their circumstances.

Mr. Cameron looked sadly upon his daughters, and said:

"I am sorry for you, my children. This will be no Christmas to you."

"Not so gay and merry a Christmas, papa," replied Julia, "as we have been accustomed to; but perhaps, after all, a better one. The recollections of this day, with its quiet, sober sadness, may hereafter give us more real pleasure than have some of our more cheerful ones."

Julia's words verified themselves in her feelings, when she was that morning seated in church. The calmness and stillness from which she had come were much more favorable to devotion than the scene of bustle and noisy mirth from which she generally on that day found her refuge within the sanctuary; and never before had the church seemed such a quiet, peaceful haven as it did this day, when a whole nation was convulsed and heaving with the storm of war. The lesson drew a vivid picture of the terrible reality in the words: "Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood;" and then, clear and distinct above the clash of arms and the shout of contending armies was heard the prophetic promise of the Child-Governor, the promise whose fulfillment they had this day come to celebrate; the Child in gentleness and tenderness, yet strong enough to bear the government upon His shoulder. Oh, how blessed, when the whole nation was scourged and panting and bleeding beneath the lashings of war, to hear of the PRINCE OF PEACE! How inexpressibly blessed, when injustice and oppression and wrong and robbery were abroad in the land, to hear of a kingdom that should be "established with *judgment* and with *justice* from henceforth even forever;" and to know that "the zeal of the LORD OF HOSTS" was pledged to perform this! Nor was there anything in the grand exultant Christmas music that was incompatible with surrounding circumstances. All the sweeter and more glorious was the song of the Herald Angels, because they sang of Peace above a world distracted by war, of Good Will, above opposing armies, each thirsting for the other's blood; and it needed, indeed, an angel-choir to "shout the glad tidings" to an oppressed and invaded land, that "Messiah is King;" that,

high above all human government, and controlling all confusion and misrule and anarchy, whether man wills it or not, "Messiah is King!"

It was, indeed, a precious Christmas service, full of soothing comfort, and Julia felt it in her inmost soul. Her troubled heart stayed itself upon the government of that kingdom of which she had now heard, and she felt so secure under it that, for the time being, she rose far above all anxieties and fears, both with regard to the final destiny of the country and the personal safety of herself and all who were dear to her. She felt so quiet and peaceful that, as she passed out of the church, she turned round at the door, with a lingering regret to cross its sacred threshold and find herself once more in the turmoil and unrest of her earthly life. Sweetly smiled the church in its Christmas dress. Font and column, desk and chancel were wreathed and garlanded, and ivy and holly and cedar had combined to beautify His sanctuary, and to make His earthly temple glorious. There was no Christmas at Cameron Hall, and at many another home in the land, where once they had held high festivity; but there was Christmas in the church. Grief and trouble may hush the voices of earthly mirth; but the church's songs of praise are but the sweeter when they ring out in the sadness and gloom of the night of sorrow!

All the other worshipers were gone, but still Julia stood and looked. She did not know how long she had been there, when she felt a gentle touch upon her shoulder. It was Uncle John, whose only Christmas greeting was a look of sympathy, a grasp of the hand, and a "God bless you, my daughter!"

As she turned round to leave the church, Charles Beaufort stood in the aisle before her.

In an instant the quiet and peace were all gone, and the old pain had come back. She gave him her hand in silence; he held it a moment, and then, placing it upon his arm, led her out without a word. When they reached the carriage, he said:

"May I come this afternoon?"

She answered, "yes:" the door was closed, and they drove off.

So sudden had been their meeting, and so quickly was it over, that it seemed, indeed, like a dream. She tried to collect her thoughts so as to be prepared to meet him calmly; but her heart was all in motion now, and its painful excitement was beyond her power to quell. His feelings toward her had not changed: she needed no words to tell her that. There was something in his look and manner, even in the quiet, protecting way in which he laid her hand upon his arm, that said plainly that he felt it to be his right and privilege to take care of her.

It was with a beating heart and a flushed cheek that she met

him in the afternoon. His manner was respectful, nay, almost reverential, but it was mingled with a tenderness that could not be mistaken; and before she took her seat, or a word had been spoken, she knew that she must go through the same scene as on that summer night.

"Julia," he said, "I have literally fulfilled your commands. I have not intruded myself by word, letter, or message; but you little know what that obedience has cost me."

He waited for a reply; but receiving none, he continued:

"I have come to ask again the same question; perhaps to receive the same answer which has weighed so heavily upon my heart ever since I left you. I have come to ask if that same barrier still separates us; and if so, may I now know what it is?"

"I am afraid, Charles, that it will separate us now more widely, more hopelessly than ever."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, gladly seizing upon the word. "Then, Julia, you would not willingly have it so! Only tell me this, only assure me that this barrier is not one of your own making, and I will not even yet despair. Oh, Julia!" he added, with an earnestness that went to her very heart, "only tell me that the hopes which, slender as they are, have nevertheless sustained me for months,—only say that these speak the truth, and I will try to be satisfied."

He took the prayer-book from his pocket, and unfolded the leaves, revealing the little faded flowers. Julia's face was crimson, as she said:

"I quite forgot those when I gave you that book. I have remembered them since, and hoped that you would not discover their hiding-place."

"You have wished me, then, deprived of my only comfort in connection with yourself! You sent me away without one word, except the assurance that between us there was a wide gulf. What it was, or whether it might ever be spanned, I did not know. I only knew that you seemed to think it impassable. One day I found these flowers, which seemed silently to contradict your actions. They assured me that no indifferent heart could have thus carefully preserved these memorials of that Sunday evening. From them I drew hope and comfort: comfort, in the belief that your heart did not respond to your actions; and hope, in the thought that no artificial barrier could eternally separate two loving hearts. I added to them others, that had been as carefully preserved as themselves: do you recognize them?"

He held up, as he spoke, the flowers tied together by a blade of grass.

"Yes," she answered, "I remember them well."

"Julia, these flowers have brought me back. But for them, I might have acquiesced hopelessly in your decree, might perhaps never have consented to the risk of feeling again the same pain that you once inflicted on me. Tell me, do they speak the truth? May I rely upon their silent testimony, and believe that you are not indifferent to me, that if you could, you would be willing to remove this barrier?"

She replied in a voice that trembled in spite of all her efforts :

"Yes, Charles, these flowers do speak the truth. I owe it to you to tell you so now, and I regret that I did not do so at first. It might perhaps have spared us both much pain if I had then told you all."

"Heaven bless you for that confession, Julia! It is worth much, very much to me."

"You must not build any hopes upon it," she answered, sadly ; "for, as I told you just now, we are more widely, more hopelessly separated than ever."

"How can that be, Julia? You acknowledge that you love me!"

"Yes, with all the strength of woman's devotion."

"Then there is nothing that ought to, or that shall separate us. What is it, Julia? You owe it to me also to tell me that. I have offered you all that a man can offer, and I might at least have the poor satisfaction of knowing why such love as mine for you must be rejected."

"Yes," she answered, "I ought to, and I will tell you why."

She hesitated, turned deadly pale, and then, with a painful effort, which awakened his deepest sympathy, she said :

"I cannot marry you, Charles, because—because I am the sister of George Cameron!"

"And is that, indeed, all?" he asked. "Is it not enough that he should be able to grieve your heart, even as it is now; do you intend that his erring life and sad end shall blight the happiness of your whole life?"

"God knows that I do not intend it, but I am afraid that it must be even so. I can neither extract the sting nor wash out the disgrace, and so I must be content to suffer the one and wear the other. Surely, Charles, you cannot wonder now at my unwillingness to bind upon another the chains which so gall myself; you cannot think it strange that I will not consent to bring to my husband the dowry of such a name!"

"A dowry which I or any other man might gladly accept, when the name belonged to such a woman as Julia Cameron. You are and must ever be to me what you are in yourself,—pure, noble, and unstained; and the crime of a whole generation of

Camerons could no more sully your character, or affect you personally, than could the foul earth at the base of Mont Blanc stain the snow upon its summit."

"You are honest and sincere, Charles, in what you say now, but your feelings have obscured your judgment. I believe that you would be perfectly willing to marry me now, but when the heat of passion should be over, and you could look calmly upon the fact that you had forever linked your untarnished name to such as mine, you would not feel that any degree of love from me could repay the sacrifice, and you would realize, when it was too late, that a good name is indeed the most priceless of earth's treasures."

"I know it already, Julia; I do not need to learn it; but I could not lose mine by giving it to you. I shall rejoice and be proud to hear you called by my name; and yet I speak truly when I say that I will regret that you must lose your own, for the name of Julia Cameron is to me synonymous with all that is upright, truthful, and beautiful in character, and so long as you yourself have not degraded and sullied it, so long must it remain as fair and spotless as it is now."

"The world, Charles, does not so regard it. Unfortunately, we are so linked together here, that the crime of one member of a family darkens not only the life and character of the individual, but that of all the rest as well. And if one thing more than another has been to me a source of painful gratitude, it is that you were prevented from speaking, and I from hearing these words two years ago. Had it been otherwise, the crime of George Cameron would have extended its baneful blight to your name as well as mine, and my life would have been doubly embittered by the thought that I, who meant to bring to my husband only the devotion of a loving heart, should have brought him instead the heritage of shame and disgrace."

"Would to God that those words had been spoken, that you had been irrevocably mine before this accursed crime had ever been committed! Then it should have been my privilege to teach you that you yourself only could estrange me from you, and that so long as you remained your own true and loving self, all the combined falsehood and crime of the whole world could be, in its effect upon you, nothing more than a passing breath upon the clear mirror. Ah, Julia, Julia! if your love were like mine, if your happiness were as dependent upon me as mine is upon you, you would not, you could not thus send me away. There is nothing, absolutely nothing under heaven but your own decree, that could separate me from you. Nothing that father, sister, brother could do, would alter my feelings toward you. My love

was not awakened by any other than yourself, and therefore nothing that another might do could possibly affect it."

"Charles," she answered, "I did not expect, and I certainly have not deserved this reproach from you. The world calls me cold, undemonstrative, perhaps unfeeling, but I thought that you, at least, knew me better. I thought that after the confession I have made, after I had told you that you have, and have long had, my whole heart, you would accept this as the strongest proof of the unselfishness of my love for you. If I did not love you so well, if I did not love you a thousandfold better than myself, if I were not willing to sacrifice my own happiness rather than yours, I would have answered you otherwise. Ah, Charles!" she added, with mournful earnestness, "you little know what I am doing for myself now. I am deliberately surrendering myself to a life of lonely sorrow; I am accepting for my heart a life-long starvation, a perpetual denial of that love on which alone its happiness can exist!"

"Then by Heaven!" he exclaimed, "it shall not be:" and springing from his chair, he walked hurriedly up and down the room. "Julia, you have no right to act thus, no right thus obstinately to reject the happiness which you acknowledge that your heart craves, and which God has placed within your grasp. It is as great a wrong as for the dying man to push from his lips the draught that might save his life!"

"You are excited now," she answered, quietly; "but could our positions be reversed, could you stand in my place, and I in yours, you would feel just as I do, and the stronger your love for me, the greater would be your reluctance to give me a sullied name."

"Ay, Julia, reverse the positions; I consent to that, and see how your love would bear the test to which you subject mine. Suppose that it were my brother instead of yours who occupied George Cameron's place, would that affect your love for me? Would you deem it right to visit his sins upon me? Would you feel that you were doing justice to your own love or to mine, by refusing to me the sympathy of a trusting heart when most I needed its sustaining power? Say, Julia, would you?"

She hesitated a moment, and then answered, thoughtfully:

"I have not taken that view of the case. No, Charles, no. On the contrary, I would but give you a fuller measure of my love, so that if possible the wife might soothe the pain which the brother had inflicted."

"I knew it, Julia. Had you answered otherwise, your love would not be what I believe it is, nor would you be the woman that you are. And can you not believe that my affection, equally

with yours, can bear this test, and that I speak what I really feel when I say that your brother, instead of being a barrier to separate us, should only draw us the more closely together? Surely, Julia," he exclaimed, suddenly, bending upon her a look of earnest inquiry, "surely, you cannot doubt me! You must believe in the sincerity of what I tell you!"

"Yes, Charles. True love admits of no doubt."

"Then will you not be convinced? Will you not be willing to look at this matter from another stand-point? for, believe me, you are wrong, wholly wrong in your views. You have yourself just confessed that you are demanding of me a different line of conduct from that which you would pursue in my circumstances."

"Oh, Charles, Charles!" she answered, in a bewildered tone, "you have confused and blinded me. I have thought deeply, painfully, over this subject. I have honestly tried to find out and to do the right, and my decision is no hasty one. As long as I reflected alone, my duty was very clear; but now, since I have listened to you, I am all bewildered again, because my feelings and inclinations side with you against my judgment. Please," she said, entreatingly, "please do not persuade me to do wrong. Whatever else I may have to bear, at least spare me this pain, and let me have the consciousness of having done right to sustain and comfort me in my trouble."

"God forbid, Julia, that I should either tempt you to the one or deprive you of the other. I do not ask you to do wrong; on the contrary, I beseech you to avoid it."

"I am painfully confused now," she answered. "I cannot oppose your arguments, nor am I prepared as yet to indorse them. I cannot trust myself to your guidance, nor am I capable of deciding this matter for myself. Oh that I only had a mother!"

"Can you not talk to your father, Julia? Surely you can trust him, and he can advise you."

"Yes, but not so well as a mother. None so well as a woman can understand a woman's feelings, and none so well as the mother who has been herself a girl can understand the daughter's doubts, and fears, and perplexities. But I will talk to papa, and he shall tell me whether I am right or wrong."

"And will you not allow me the same privilege? If you array your arguments against our marriage, it is but fair that I should be permitted to urge mine in its behalf."

"Certainly, this is your right. I regret the necessity, because it involves a subject extremely painful to papa; but the interests at stake are sufficient to justify it. But there are others whose advice I wish you to ask besides my father's."

"I obey, Julia, though you yourself are sole arbiter of my fate. If you will consent, no human being shall separate us. But who is it that I am to ask?"

"Your own parents, Charles. Write to them, tell them all. State the case in all its black and gloomy truth, and ask them if they are willing that their son should marry the sister of a traitor. Promise to do this, and to tell me truthfully what they say. I think, Charles, you will find that my notions are neither so peculiar to myself nor so wrong as you deem them now. You will find that others agree with me."

"Whoever else may agree with you, Julia, I am quite certain that my parents will not. They have no such morbid notions as yours, and they love their son too well to let such a thing as this shut him out from happiness. Experience has taught them both the value of a good husband and a good wife, and they would not, except for some very grave reason, deny their son and the woman of his choice that happiness which themselves can so well appreciate. I can answer for them, Julia, without waiting to write."

"But this will not satisfy me; you must promise to ask their advice."

"I will before I sleep to-night; and I will do more than this: I will talk the matter over with Uncle John, and hear his opinion. You have confidence in him?"

"Yes, in most things; but in this, scarcely more than I have in you or in myself. I know that Uncle John regards my notions upon this subject as you do. He thinks that they are unreasonable and morbid, and, like you, would be sure to say that I have no right to allow them any weight in the decision of this matter. I have no objection to your talking to him—indeed, I prefer that you should; but I can tell you beforehand what he will say."

"I wonder, Julia, that it has not made you distrust the soundness of your judgment, to find so many whose opinions differ from yours. You are not accustomed to be so unyielding in other matters."

"No; but this is of such vital importance, and so much depends upon it, that it behooves me, for your sake as well as mine, to be careful lest passion and inclination should mislead me. I know my own temperament and disposition, and what it requires to make me happy, and if I should marry you, and from any cause whatever, whether the fault were my own or another's, should find that I did not have your respect and esteem, words cannot express the wretchedness of my life. This fear that you will not be able thus to respect me with my sullied name, now

holds me back as with a grasp of iron; for when the ardor of youthful passion shall have subsided, there must be the basis of respect and esteem on which to found a reasonable, but none the less real affection: otherwise there can be no true happiness."

"You are right, Julia, and it is just because esteem and respect are necessary elements of my affection that I have sought you. I could not love a woman whom I did not respect in my inmost soul, and upon whose principles I could not rely with unwavering trust. Such is the feeling with which I regard you, and it is this which makes my love for you so entirely independent of the character and conduct of all others."

"You have not convinced me yet, Charles," she answered. "The truth is, I am afraid to be convinced, afraid to listen to your arguments, because my feelings and wishes are so strongly enlisted on your side of the question that I dare not trust myself. Of one thing, however, I am sure, and that is that I want to do right, and have made up my mind that if I can find out what the right is, to do it at whatever sacrifice."

"But who is to decide what is right? You are not willing to trust either yourself or myself, those who are certainly the most interested, neither will you yield to Uncle John's judgment. Will you let your father and my parents decide the question for you, and if their united judgment shall accord with mine, and with your wishes, will you promise to yield?"

"Yes, on one condition, and that is that you try yourself a little longer." She hesitated a moment, and then added, with an effort: "You have not been fairly tried yet. Wait until you see my brother held up, as he will be, to the scorn and execration of the nation. Wait until you see his name branded in the public newspapers, with every epithet from which a true, honest man shrinks, and see then if you will still be willing to marry his sister."

"I have been already sufficiently tested on that point. The end of his sad career involves no element of disgrace that it did not have in the beginning, and I knew all that when I asked you months ago to be my wife. Julia," he added, suddenly, "it is hard for me to be patient with you in this matter. Your determination and your unwillingness to be convinced are absolutely unaccountable."

"Not unwillingness, Charles. I insist upon that. However, I have agreed to place our happiness at the disposal of others, and if your parents and my father see nothing in my circumstances to prevent me from becoming your wife, I will hesitate no longer."

"Then, Julia, our happiness is sealed, at least so far as the decision of my parents is concerned, and I cannot but believe that your father as well as they will prove less cruel than yourself."

"I shall be glad when it is decided," she said, wearily; "for oh, Charles! you little dream of the heaviness of these past months of doubt, and thought, and struggle. I am exhausted, worn out in mind and body."

"And I, Julia, not less so than yourself. How much of suffering we might both have been spared if you could only have seen this thing in its true light! Now, however, I trust that doubts and anxieties are at an end."

"I would not have you too sanguine, Charles. It may be that papa's views will coincide with mine rather than with yours. I find that many of what you and Uncle John call my morbid notions are not peculiar to myself, but have been inherited from him."

"At least, Julia, he will be open to conviction. Is he at home? and if so, may I see him at once? I am not willing to bear this suspense and uncertainty another night, and must have my final answer before I leave you. If I gain your own and your father's consent, I shall fear nothing else."

In his interview with Mr. Cameron, Charles did not encounter that opposition which Julia's words had led him to fear; for while her father appreciated and sympathized with her feelings, because they were precisely his own, yet, in a matter which so completely involved her happiness, he was unwilling to assume the responsibility of influencing her decision, but preferred to trust to that judgment which in other less important matters he had generally found good.

With a paternal pride, which his listener readily excused, Mr. Cameron finished by saying:

"When you know my daughter, Charles, as I know her, you will find that she has some notions and feelings which are perhaps exaggerated, and which for the sake of her own happiness you may desire to change, but which at the same time you will be compelled to respect, because they are, after all, only the exaggeration of virtues, and show how little of base alloy is mingled with her honest, truthful nature. As to yourself, Charles, I cheerfully commit her happiness to your keeping, for I believe that you can thoroughly understand and appreciate her character, and are capable of giving in return for the pure, deep love that you have won an affection which will satisfy all her demands. The father of such a daughter may be pardoned for saying that when you have married Julia you will have found a wife indeed."

"I know it, sir," was the hearty response, "and I trust and

believe that you will find me not unworthy of the high confidence that you place in me. Thank you for it, Mr. Cameron, as well as for the treasure that you have committed to my keeping. I am now indeed happy."

The few days of Charles's leave of absence sped by too rapidly for them both. His was a happiness so brightly contrasted with the anxiety and sadness of the past few months, that his spirits overflowed in an unnatural exhilaration, while Julia's feeling was one of rest, of sweet repose, rather than exuberant happiness; the same sense of quiet security which the shipwrecked mariner might have when, after having given up all hope, he awakes from a sleep of exhaustion and sorrow to find his frail raft floating safely upon the smooth waters of a quiet haven, where the shore may be reached without an effort. From this state she vainly tried to arouse herself. She would not consider her happiness complete until Charles had heard from his parents, and she was altogether unwilling to surrender herself to her sweet dream from which an awakening would add to sorrow the bitterness of disappointment; but Julia, as she herself had expressed it, was worn out by the struggle of months, and after a vain effort to resist, she yielded herself to Charles's assurance, and rested calmly and sweetly in the belief that from his father and mother she need expect nothing but the warm welcome of loving hearts.

The evening before he left Hopedale, he came out to the Hall with an open letter in his hand, and his face radiant with joy.

"Read it," he said, giving it to her, "read it, Julia. All obstacles are removed. Now you are indeed my wife."

"Yes, Charles, your wife," she answered, as she folded the letter, and her eyes glistening with tears, she murmured, quietly, "thank God!"

"And how long must I wait for the full realization of my happiness?"

"Until the war is over."

"Oh, Julia, you are not in earnest! Surely you cannot be!"

"Yes; I yielded my judgment in the other case because it was opposed to that of all others, but now I know that I am right, from the fact that I have papa's opinion of this matter in the case of Willie and Eva. He thinks that they ought to wait, and yet, with his usual consideration and kindness, has promised not to insist upon their separation if it should prove more than they can bear."

"And may we not claim the same promise, Julia?"

"No, for we are older than those children, and ought to look at things in their true light, and be both able and willing to sacrifice inclination to duty. Willie honestly believes that he can do

a soldier's service better as a husband than as a lover, while you and I know that all experience proves the contrary, and that every man who goes into the army, leaving a wife behind, subject to privation and toil, goes with heart and energies fettered. Now I would not have you so hampered; I would have you free to do your duty. Shall we not agree to try and postpone the thought of ourselves, and our own individual happiness, until our country shall no longer need you?"

"But suppose that I should be sick or wounded? As my wife you might come to me, and do for me what now it would be impossible for you to do. Ah, Julia! a hospital, in its best estate, offers but a miserable substitute for the gentle offices of woman, and many a poor fellow thinks, with a heavy heart and a moistened eye, of the life that he feels is ebbing away, and that he knows might have been saved by the careful nursing of the loved ones at home. You would not condemn me to this?"

"Never. Only so long as you can be useful to your country, do I consider our first duty to her. If sick or wounded, your duties are temporarily, at least, suspended, and then my duty is due to you. In such a case, if you can be brought to the Hall, you shall come, and Mr. Derby shall in a few minutes seal that relationship which will give me the wife's place and the wife's right to do for you whatever human power can do to comfort and to heal; and if you cannot come to me, I will promise to go to you,—in the hospital, in the tent, on the field, wherever you may be. Will this suffice? and am I not right?"

"It must suffice, since you have so decreed it, and I believe that you are right, as you generally are, but that right imposes on us, on me at least, great self-denial and sacrifice."

"On *us*," she replied. "I prefer your first expression. I am imposing on you no sacrifice which I do not feel myself, and which I am not obliged to feel more heavily in the quiet and anxiety of my separation from you, than you will, in the active employment both for mind and body of your daily life in camp."

"Then, Julia," he said, sadly, "I am afraid that our complete happiness is still distantly prospective. This fearful war may last a long time yet."

"I am afraid that it will, but we must try to bear our proportion of its trials bravely and hopefully, thanking God for the privilege of being bound together in heart at least, if not by the outward tie."

"How often may I hear from you?"

"Just as often as you desire. The support and sympathy that you need to sustain and comfort you, I will be able, under the circumstances, to give better than any one else, and as it will be

my duty as well as my pleasure, I need not be afraid of indulging in it to excess."

Charles knew full well that Julia spoke truly when she said that every restriction imposed upon him was equally painful to herself. He saw plainly that from her present decision there was no appeal, but even while he regretted it he was constrained to admire and respect her conscientious adherence to what she conceived to be her duty, even in matters which concern the affections alone, and which are not generally considered legitimate subjects for the restraints of conscience.

When she bade him farewell, it was not, as Eva had parted from Willie, in a flood of tears. Her face was very pale, but calm, and the tears trembled in her eyes, but not one overflowed, as she said :

"God bless you, Charles! Be faithful to your God first, to your country next. To see you will be my longing desire; but that you may do your duty faithfully and unshrinkingly at all times, under all circumstances, and at all hazards, shall be my constant prayer."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SEVERAL weeks had passed away. Julia was not what the world calls happy, but she was very quiet and peaceful. The thought of her brother was, and she knew that it would be all through life, a burden from which there was no escape. Unlike the pain of bereavement, time has, for the feeling of mortification and shame, no healing power, and the sting rankles as keenly after years have passed away, as it did at first. She found, however, in Charles's love a support, a sustaining power, whose value she fully appreciated, and for which she poured out a daily thanksgiving. But while for herself she was profoundly grateful for that rest and quiet which she was now enjoying, instead of that racking torture which she had so long borne, she was grieved to see Eva sink so completely under the weight of anxieties and troubles which were all so new to her. Willie was still removed not more than a day's journey from her, but had never again returned to the Hall. There were no longer even any rumors of raiding parties, but the country was still without

the Confederate lines, and exposed to incursions from the enemy, and as he was yet very far from recovered, and the weather intensely cold, he had prudently heeded the advice of Mr. Cameron, and had abstained from again undertaking a journey which involved so much risk and exposure. Willie, while almost a boy in years, began now to feel the responsibilities of manhood, and to realize that he must act for another as well as for himself; for although Eva tried hard to write cheerfully, as she had promised, yet he saw plainly from her letters that she needed all his support and encouragement to enable her to bear their separation at all. He had promised Mr. Cameron that they should both submit without a murmur to his decree, and he tried conscientiously to keep Eva as well as himself up to its fulfillment. His letters had been always bright and hopeful, containing very little about the present, and with no mention of his condition or sufferings, but full of the future, the blissful future, all radiant with hope and full of happiness. These letters, however, did not satisfy Eva. He had promised that just so soon as he was well enough, he would come back to the Hall if it was safe, and if not, would go home to his mother and sisters; but week after week the letters came, with nothing about his health, and nothing about either coming to her or going to them. At last her anxiety became intolerable. Her repeated questions about his health were still unanswered, and she knew very well that if he had anything favorable to tell her he would gladly do so. At last she wrote to him and told him how miserable and anxious she was, and that the very worst he could tell her about himself would be less intolerable than her present suspense. These plain, downright questions he could neither evade nor ignore, and in his reply he answered them truthfully, telling her that he was not recovering so rapidly as he could wish, and that at times he still suffered very great pain. He tried faithfully to guard against any expression of despondency, uttered not one longing for her, and did not even say that he would be happier or more comfortable with her society and attentions. But with all his care, she needed no words to interpret the feeling which, while he did not express it, he yet could not wholly conceal, and her fears at once greatly exaggerated his condition, and she imagined him suffering as she had known him do at the Hall. Alone among strangers, perhaps with neither surgical skill nor proper nursing, and this within a day's journey of her whose duty it was, and who had sacredly promised to do these things for him.

She was sitting in her little chair, by Willie's sofa, pondering the contents of the open letter in her lap. Her father was in the room, but she did not know that he was sadly watching her as she

leaned her head upon her hand, the young, childish face contrasting painfully with her attitude of womanly perplexity and sorrow. Like Julia, Mr. Cameron too had seen with pain the change that had come over his light-hearted child. The elastic step, now slow and languid; the sunny face, now always clouded with anxiety; the bright, laughing eye, now glistening with tears or glazed with weeping,—all these assured him that the child of his home and his heart could never be a child again. And yet there was no murmur or complaint. She had promised Willie to try and bear it like a Christian, and she did so, and it was her uncomplaining sorrow that had so deeply touched her father's heart. He watched her now several minutes as she sat thinking deeply, when all at once, as if by an irresistible impulse, she sprang up, and placing the letter in his hand, said:

"Papa, I have tried to bear it. Read this: sick, suffering, alone, he needs me. Is it right that I should stay away?"

She stood by while her father read the letter, whose contents, not less than her appearance, appealed to his sympathy. When he was done, he looked for a few moments in silent compassion upon the struggle, between the child and the woman, that he so plainly saw in that young heart. She was evidently trying to keep back her tears, and to bear with fortitude the burden that she felt was too heavy for her; but while striving to be a woman, Eva was in reality still a child, and finally the child predominated. She sat down upon her father's knee as she used to do long years ago, and putting one arm around his neck, laid her head upon his shoulder and sobbed aloud.

This was more than the father could bear. He laid his hand upon her head, and said:

"I cannot separate you and Willie any longer, my child. You shall be married at once."

She jumped up, and with her old impulsiveness caught her father in her arms, and kisses were her only thanks, as her laughter and tears were mingled together.

"And may I write to Willie, papa, and tell him what you say?"

"Yes; but not this minute," he added, detaining her, as like the arrow from a bow she was darting off to communicate the glad tidings. "You must be prudent in this matter, Eva, or you children, in your eagerness and haste, will probably overlook what is necessary for his safety. Willie is still an invalid, as this letter plainly shows, and must not undertake to come to you until he can do so comfortably and without risk. We must first provide some means for him to get here, and then give him permission to come."

"But how can we provide means for him to come, papa?"

We have no conveyance to send for him, no horses——Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, in nervous, restless haste, "how can he come? What must I do?"

"The first thing for you to do, my child," he said, taking her hand, "is to compose yourself. You are greatly excited now. Your cheeks are flushed, and your heart is beating like a sledge-hammer. I will keep you here until you are calmed down a little, and then you shall go to your sister. She is good at making arrangements, and perhaps, with Uncle John's assistance, she can decide upon some plan for accomplishing your wishes."

She waited a little while, and said:

"I am quiet now, papa,—may I go?"

"Not yet."

A few moments more elapsed, and she said, trembling with impatience:

"Now, papa! Indeed, I am just as calm and composed as I can be. May I go?"

"Very calm and composed, doubtless, with those sparkling eyes, and that hurried breathing, and that fluttering heart! But go, child, I will not detain you any longer."

She was gone in an instant. Her father's eyes followed her, and he murmured, sadly:

"Your heart needs more sunshine, my poor child, than it will find in this world of clouds and shadow!"

Eva ran first to find Bob, and sent him with all speed to town, requesting Uncle John to come to her as quickly as possible. She then went to her sister to pour out to her the full tide of her happiness.

Thus abruptly summoned, without a word of explanation, Uncle John, who was walking leisurely along the street when Bob hailed him from the buggy, jumped in, and seizing the reins, applied the lash vigorously, but in vain, for the poor old mule was incapable of the locomotion that his impatience demanded.

"What is the matter, Bob?" he inquired anxiously. "Is anybody sick?"

"Don't know, sir," answered Bob, with stolid indifference.

"Just as I expected," muttered Uncle John. "Never knew a negro in my life to know anything that he was asked. The Know-Nothing party will never become extinct while there is a negro left!"

And venting his vexation on the unfortunate mule, he lashed him again, but it was useless; and, finally, Uncle John settled himself down to a state of mingled anxiety and impatience, while the mule walked quietly along to the Hall.

When he was told why he was sent for, with a smile of relief and pleasure that belied his words, he said to Eva, pinching her cheek :

"Now, my little miss, I have a great mind not to help you out of your difficulty at all. It would only be punishing you as you deserve, for giving me such a fright. I thought that somebody must be either dying or dead, or that some dire calamity had befallen the family, when lo and behold ! it is only that old Uncle John's services are wanted to help two children to get married !"

"You must excuse my thoughtlessness, Uncle John. I did not mean to send such an abrupt message. I did not think——"

"Of anything, or anybody, Eva, but Willie. Well, I will forgive you this time, on condition that hereafter you will be more considerate. Now, what is it that I am to do ?"

"To devise some way to get Willie here comfortably and safely."

"Which means," replied Uncle John, laughing, "to go after him and bring him."

"Oh no, Uncle John !" exclaimed Mr. Cameron ; "she does not mean that. Eva is too considerate to ask or wish such a thing of a man of your age at this season. She only wants some advice and help about arranging a plan."

"I am only a few weeks older, Mr. Cameron, and it is not a great deal colder than it was when I did the same thing before."

"But I did not ask it, Uncle John," said Eva. "It was your own voluntary proposition. Remember that."

"And the fact that you did the same thing only a few weeks ago," interposed Mr. Cameron, "is only an additional reason why she would not be so unreasonable as to wish you to do it again."

"What do you say to all this, my daughter?" asked Uncle John.

Eva thought a moment, and then replied, frankly :

"To tell the truth, Uncle John, I would be very glad for you to go. Papa is right when he says that I do not ask or expect it, but I cannot go so far as he does, and say that I do not wish it. On the contrary, I would be better satisfied for Willie to come with you than with anybody else, for he is not prudent, and you would take care of him."

"And I will go for him," replied Uncle John, pulling one of her curls, "although you do not deserve it, you naughty girl ! My old heart has not quieted down yet."

"And will you indeed go for him ? you dear, good Uncle John !"

she replied, joyfully. "What can I do to repay you for all your kindness to us?"

"You can bring back the roses to your cheeks, and the light to your eyes, and the happiness to your heart, and be the glad, merry child that you used to be. I am half disposed to quarrel with Willie for having so suddenly and unexpectedly cut short your childhood. The old Hall needs a child to lighten it, and it has not had one since Willie came here last summer."

"Ah, Uncle John!" she answered, with a sigh, "the child Eva you will never see again! I trust and believe that you will yet see me happy, more so than I ever was before, but it will be a different sort of happiness from that careless light-heartedness that I used to feel. It will be a woman's happiness, and with that there must always mingle some care and anxiety."

"Of course, no longer a child!" he replied, with a smile, determined to prevent the conversation from assuming that shade of sadness which seemed now to tinge everything at the Hall. "No one would hereafter presume to apply the epithet 'child' to Mrs. Eva ——"

"Oh, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, blushing, "please don't. I did not mean that, indeed I didn't. Come, now, let us talk over our plan and decide upon it."

"It is already decided, Eva. I am to go and bring Willie. It only remains for you to say when."

"Just as soon as you please, Uncle John."

"Just as soon as you can, you mean, Eva. Suppose I go in the morning, how would that suit you?"

"Better than any other time, if it were practicable; but I am afraid that you cannot possibly go so soon. You know that we have no horses, nor do I know where you are to find any."

"Never mind, I will arrange all that, and will promise to bring him safely and comfortably, and I hope looking much better than we have ever seen him yet. Willie will be a handsome boy when the bloom of health is upon his cheek, don't you think so, Eva?"

"He need not wait for that, Uncle John. A face, however pale and wan, must needs be handsome with such eyes, such expression, such a smile. But I greatly fear that Willie will neither be any better nor be looking better than when we parted with him. I judge from this letter that there has been no improvement whatever in his condition since he left here."

"That is only because he is tired, and lonely, and homesick. When he has the proper nurse, I'll warrant that he will get well fast enough. We will have him back in the army in a few weeks."

"Oh, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, deprecatingly, "don't say that. It will be a long, long time before he will be strong enough to go into service again."

"Doubtless, if he waits for you to say so; but you must remember, my daughter, that Willie is a soldier, and his place is in the army, and whenever he is well enough to go, you must not hold him back."

"Nor will I, Uncle John; but even if I were to try to do so, it would be in vain, for Willie is determined to do his duty."

"I believe it, child; if I did not, when Mr. Derby gives the last opportunity for objection to be made before pronouncing you man and wife, Uncle John's voice should be heard forbidding the bans. I would never give you to a man who would be unfaithful to his duty at such a crisis as this. Would you, Mr. Cameron?"

"Never, sir; but I am not afraid of either of the children, Uncle John. Willie will do what is right; and as to this child, she has a child's heart but a woman's principles. We may trust her."

When Uncle John went back to town to make his arrangements for the morrow's departure, Eva wrote to Willie a glad, joyous letter, sparkling with her own overflowing happiness. Uncle John returned in the afternoon, and when she met him, with her eye beaming, and her face bright and joyous, he said, laughingly:

"Why, Eva, among other things, I must henceforth reckon myself a tolerable physician. You have made a marvelous stride toward the bloom and strength of health since I promised, a few hours ago, to bring Willie to you. You look now almost like the Eva of old."

"I am happy, now, Uncle John," she answered, "so happy!"

And if Eva was so happy, what shall be said of Willie, when he looked up wearily from his book, as a carriage stopped at the door, and he beheld Uncle John's welcome face! and when he learned wherefore he had come, and when he had read Eva's letter, his excitement was quite too great for his strength.

"God bless Mr. Cameron," he said, earnestly, "for the kind consideration which would not longer separate us! I will have a double motive now for being a soldier in very deed and truth."

"And Eva, I hope, will be her former self. Anxiety about you, Willie, has sadly altered her, and she fancied that you are still as great a sufferer as you were last summer."

"She is not far wrong, sir, although I have never told her so. I am not doing well. My wound is not healing as I would like

to see it, nor do I believe that it ever will, unless I have a better surgeon than I have here. If I had had a comfortable mode of conveyance, I should have gone back to the Hall two weeks ago; but I dared not undertake the journey on horseback again, for it was a serious injury to me before, although Eva does not know it. I have been thinking seriously, the last two days, of trying to get home, although I doubt very much my ability to do so. I believe, however, Uncle John," he added, smiling, "that all things considered, I would rather go back with you to Cameron Hall, than to go even to Alabama."

"That, I think, is quite probable, my son. Don't you think, Willie, that you ought to be everlastingly grateful to me for that transfer of you from the hospital to the Hall? I am sure that I little dreamed what I was doing for you."

"Nor did I, sir. I am afraid, however, that you will have to take words only, empty words for an expression of my gratitude; for, indeed, I do not know anything that I can do to show it."

"Yes, my son, the most acceptable proof of your gratitude, both to her father and myself, is to show yourself worthy of her, and to take loving care of the child; and this I believe you will do."

"God helping me, sir, I will!"

It was late in the afternoon when the travelers reached the grove near Cameron Hall. Willie's head was out of the carriage watching the winding road, until a sudden turn revealed just what he expected to see—Eva sitting on the same rock, under the walnut-tree, where he had found her before. A cry of joy burst simultaneously from both; Uncle John checked the horses, and in an instant Eva was beside Willie, alternately laughing and crying for joy.

That night, as Willie was lying upon the sofa, looking so comfortable and happy, with Eva by his side, all brightness and sunshine again, Uncle John said:

"It does my old heart good to see you two children so happy. It is a privilege that none but children enjoy now. We old people are too anxious to be happy; but I am going to put on my gayest and most cheerful spirits for the wedding. When is it to be?"

"To-morrow, sir," answered Willie.

"To-morrow, Willie!" exclaimed they all together.

"Yes," he said, much surprised. "I thought that was understood. Eva said in her letter that it was to be at once."

"But, indeed, Willie," said Julia, laughing, "you do not give me time to make any wedding-cake, or arrange Eva's bridal dress, or do any of the thousand little nameless things that go to make up a wedding. What an inconsiderate bridegroom you are!"

"I don't want to be inconsiderate," he answered, good-humoredly, "or unmindful of the convenience of others. I am a novice in all such things, and so my faults and blunders must be laid at the door of ignorance. I will do anything and submit to anything, on one condition; and that is, that you will arrange matters as expeditiously as possible. As to wedding-cake, we can dispense with that until after the war; and as to Eva's bridal dress, I would rather she should wear that white muslin that she had on the evening that I first saw her, than the richest robe of silk that could be bought in Paris."

"And so would I, Willie," said Eva. "I would like to be married in that dress, because it is associated with such pleasant memories of you. May I wear it, sister?"

"Certainly, if you prefer it."

"And if," said Willie, "a bride without a veil is not an intolerable anomaly, and if it is not unheard-of presumption in me to make any requests with regard to my bride's toilet, I would prefer that Eva should not wear a veil. When I look at her, I want to look right down into her eyes, without having an intervening cloud to shut out their light from me."

"Why, Willie," said Eva, laughing, "don't you know that a bride's veil does not cover her face? That is not the fashion now."

"I thought," he replied, "that the use of a veil was to cover the face; but since this is not so, and it is a useless appendage, and since we are not to have any wedding-party, I suppose we can be allowed a privilege enjoyed by few bridal couples, that of selecting our own dress, without fear of running counter to any of the old acknowledged customs. Now, if I am making any monstrous demands, you must tell me, for I don't want to be unreasonable or exacting."

"The absence of a veil," said Eva, "would be a matter of necessity, if it were not of choice; since no suitable material could be found in Hopedale now, and I cannot send elsewhere. You don't know, papa, how much expense you will be spared by my being married during the war. In former times, it would have involved an expenditure of many hundreds of dollars with New York milliners and dress-makers."

"Which would not have added one atom to our happiness, Eva," said Willie. "I doubt if either of us will ever feel the want of those months of preparation, which usually employ the time and thoughts of a whole household on a wedding occasion. My Confederate gray and your simple muslin will make us just as happy as the most expensive satin and broadcloth could do."

"I have been opposed, from the beginning," said Uncle John,

"to putting any unnecessary delays and impediments in the way of the children's happiness; and if they are content to do without cake and furbelows, why not let them be married to-morrow?"

"That is just as they please," said Julia, "provided papa does not prefer delay."

"The delay of a day or two would make no difference," he replied. "If they are going to be married before the end of the war, I would as soon that it should be to-morrow as any other time."

"Then, to-morrow it shall be," said Willie. "Shall it not, Eva?"

"Yes, Willie, to-morrow."

"Will you let me select the hour?" asked Julia.

"Yes, gladly, sister," replied Eva. "I would like something about my wedding specially of your own choosing."

"Then let it be as near twilight as possible. The church wears an aspect of holy solemnity at that hour, which it has at no other time."

It was just at sunset, on a quiet February evening, that the youthful pair stood before the chancel "to be joined together in holy matrimony." The waning light fell, softened and subdued, through the rich coloring of the stained glass, and one clear bright ray of the setting sun streamed, rich and full, and fell like a halo upon Eva's golden hair. Through the tall arches and up to the vaulted roof, daylight and darkness were struggling for the mastery, and along the silent aisles, and in the empty pews, the shadows were gathering, and over all there reigned a peaceful calm, a holy solitude, a reverent silence, which, more impressively than words, proclaims: "the Lord is in His holy temple." It was the hour to solemnize, and the devotion of the little company assembled there formed a striking contrast to the levity and mirth which even the sacredness of the church cannot, on such occasions, always restrain.

Eva's dress was the extreme of simplicity. Her soft, white muslin was without ornament, save the single white camellia that was fastened upon her bosom. A wreath of delicate flowers, which her own hands had twined, rested upon her brow; and beneath it fell the rich, clustering, golden curls, whose luxuriance and profusion rendered a veil superfluous indeed.

The service was over. Side by side they knelt at the altar, and the minister's hand still lingered, in paternal blessing, upon the young heads bowed before him, when all at once the low, trembling tones of the organ broke the stillness, not in an outburst of joyous music, but in rich melody, interwoven with a minor strain of plaintive sorrow. Deep and solemn rolled the

tide of music through the gathering darkness, and now and then a note of low, sobbing bass fell almost like a wail upon the ear and heart. In silence and wonder they all listened to the blind child, as she interpreted their feelings by her own music. It is never with a feeling of unmingled joy that the child, the sister, is forever surrendered to the keeping of another!

There was no movement until the last note of the organ had died away into silence, and then Willie and Eva went up to Agnes. Her face was sad, and there was a tear upon her cheek.

"My child," said her mother, almost reproachfully, "your music was too sad for a wedding, and especially for Eva's. She ought to have had glad, joyous music."

"No, mother, the organ spoke her feelings as well as ours. Her marriage takes her away from us, and takes us away from her. The music spoke the truth, mother."

"You are right, Agnes," said Eva, her eyes full of tears. "I am happy, very happy now; but with it all there will blend sad thoughts of leaving home and friends, and of Willie leaving me before long. Yes," she added, thoughtfully, "your music indeed spoke the truth!"

When they left the church, twilight had faded away into dark night, and the stars were shining. Below, all was shrouded in darkness; above, all was clear and bright, meet emblem of the life on whose threshold those two young hearts now stood. Its trials and difficulties and sorrows, like the unsightly objects of earth, were mercifully hidden beneath the dark veil of the future; but hope, like the cloudless vault above, spanned their earthly life, and love, like those quenchless stars, would only shine the brighter in the darkest night!

Willie and Eva had been married a week. The bright afternoon sunshine, as clear and cloudless as their own hearts, had tempted them from the fire, and arm in arm they were walking up and down the winding, graveled road that led to the gate of the lawn. All their talking was, as usual, of the future; and now, with the elasticity of youth, they had leaped over all the intervening time of war and suffering and bloodshed, and were planning what they would do, and how happy they would be, when blessed peace should once more have settled upon the land, and Willie, his duty done, his country free, should have returned in safety and honor to her proud and loving heart. Their home-picture was a sweet one, for its outlines were sketched by a vivid, youthful fancy, and its colors were borrowed from the rainbow of hope, and the whole was flooded by the glowing sunshine of warm, young hearts. No wonder that its serene and quiet beauty tempted them to forget the scene of strife and danger, of pain and turmoil

which must be passed, before they could realize and enjoy what now they could only imagine. They were talking and dreaming of the future, when Uncle John's voice recalled them to the present, as, riding up behind them, he exclaimed :

"I told you, Eva, that your nursing would soon recall Willie to health and strength ; but I scarcely expected to see such wonderful results in so short a time. What have you been doing to him ?"

"Nothing as yet, Uncle John," she replied, laughing, "except to make promises. He seems to be perfectly contented for the present, to be told what I am going to be to him and to do for him in the future. We have just been planning a sweet home, where we are to live when the war is over, and where there is to be a snug little room always ready to welcome Uncle John when he comes to see us every spring. You will promise to do that as long as you live, won't you ?"

"Yes, daughter," he replied, with an involuntary sigh, "when the war is over and you and Willie are settled in your own home, I will promise to come and see you every spring. But how is this, Willie," he asked, with a sudden cheerfulness, as if striving to cast away sad thoughts, "how is it that you have recovered so wonderfully as to be able to walk about the yard ?"

"It is some of this witch's magic, Uncle John."

"Rather some of sister's good nursing, Willie. Give the praise where it is due."

"Yes," he answered, "some of sister's good nursing. She and the doctor have taken me under their care this week, and I am much better for it. I was quite sure, as I told you, that my wound needed better treatment than it had had since I left here."

Just then Julia appeared, hastening to meet them.

"Oh, Willie!" she exclaimed, "is it possible that you are walking about here in the cold? I declare, Uncle John, I cannot trust these children out of my sight for a single moment. After Eva's lecture upon prudence, it would seem that we might expect better things of her; but indeed she knows no more about it practically than Willie does, and permits him to do all sorts of improper things. Come, you must go back into the house this moment."

They went into the library, where they found Mr. Cameron, who asked, as soon as he saw Uncle John :

"Where is Agnes? Why didn't you bring her?"

Mr. Cameron's heart now clung to his granddaughter, and it was a triple cord that bound her to him. It was the same old compassionate feeling for her infirmity and for her gentle cheerfulness that had first drawn him to her, now deepened and

strengthened by the consciousness that she was indeed his own by the strongest of ties, and to this was superadded an indescribable tenderness, as he saw in her a memorial of his son,—that son, whom as the wayward youth, the erring man, he strove to forget, but whom as the child he still loved to remember, the first-born of his house, the infant who had first awakened in his breast a father's feelings, and who was so identified with the memories of his young wife, his first home, his early manhood. All these the sight of Agnes revived. In her he could recall them all, without the bitterness and the pang which ever accompanied the thought of George; and as he felt himself now rapidly growing old under the weight of care and anxiety, he was thankful for the comfort and companionship of Agnes. More especially was this the case just at this time. He had given up one daughter, the other was pledged, and he did not know how soon she too would be claimed at his hands; he had surrendered his only son to his country's service, and without Agnes he felt that his old age would be desolate indeed. Besides all this, Mr. Cameron experienced a strange sort of pleasure in the thought that she was blind, that none would ever try to win the blind child away from his heart, and in her helplessness he felt a security that while he lived her blind life would be the sunshine of his own. All these thoughts he had revolved in his mind, and there was but one thing wanting to make his satisfaction complete. He wanted to tell the child that she belonged to him, that he had a right to her, inferior only to that of her mother, and that she occupied in his heart the same place as Julia and Eva. He did not sympathize in Grace's feelings about this matter, and was restless under the restriction to which he had so reluctantly consented. He had frequently talked to Uncle John about it, but Uncle John agreed with the mother. He always said:

“Let the mother have her own way, Mr. Cameron. She knows the child better than you do, and thinks she is happier as she is, and so I would let her remain.”

And Mr. Cameron felt himself constrained to acquiesce, though still unconvinced. To the question which he had now asked, Uncle John replied:

“I would have brought her, but she is not well this morning.”

“I trust that there is not much the matter!”

“I think not, but her mother is evidently distressed and anxious. Indeed the possession of that child can scarcely be called a pleasure, for the fear of losing her quite counterbalances Grace's present enjoyment of her.”

“Why so?” inquired Mr. Cameron. “I have never seen

anything about Agnes to awaken apprehensions of that sort. On the contrary, I think that she has the promise of as long a life as any child of my acquaintance."

"So I think, sir. I suppose that the mother's anxiety is natural, and rendered morbid perhaps by the possession of only one comfort in a life otherwise made up of sorrow and disappointment. Another reason for it may be found in the fact that she regards Agnes's musical genius as an unnatural development, a premature maturity, involving premature decay, while, as I have often told her, it is no development at all, but simply a gift, which would be quite as wonderful in the full-grown woman as it is in the child, and was bestowed upon her as a compensation for her blindness. This, however, Grace will not believe, and the slightest indisposition on the part of Agnes renders her as wretched as another mother would be at the serious illness of a child. She is miserable now because Agnes has not touched the organ to-day; but the child feels languid and badly, and does not want to play, that is all."

"I must go and see for myself what is the matter, and if she is sick she must be brought here. I shall insist upon that."

"You will encounter no opposition there, I assure you, sir. If Agnes should be very sick, which I do not think at all probable, her mother will find her anxiety intolerable in the solitude of her own home, and will be only too glad to seek the sympathy and assistance which she will be sure of finding here."

"They ought both to be here all the time," said Mr. Cameron, with a little impatience in his tone, "and it is a foolish notion of Grace's that prevents it. The child is too young to be made miserable, even if she knew it all. On the contrary, I believe that she would be happier, for she is of an affectionate nature, and her heart would go out gladly toward her newly-found relatives. As to myself, I need her, and ought to have her, especially when this child goes away, which she threatens to do in a week."

"What! so soon as that, Eva?" asked Uncle John.

"Yes, sir," answered Willie, "it must be. If I continue to improve another week as I have done during this one, I shall be able by that time to undertake the journey by short stages. When I am fit for service again I will bring Eva back, and lend her to her father and sister while I am in the army. They must promise, however, to take better care of her than they did the last time that I left her in their keeping, for instead of the blooming, rosy-cheeked girl that I lent them, they returned me a pale, wan, sad-looking bride."

"That was not our fault, Willie," said Julia, "as Uncle John can testify; and unless as your wife she shall bear up more bravely

under anxiety and separation than she did as your betrothed, we will be obliged to return her to you looking just as she did before. I hope, however, that under your tuition she will learn fortitude."

"Yes," answered Eva, cheerfully, "I am sure that I will. If Willie had been at home with his mother, or even in the army, strong and well and with plenty to do, I would not have been so distressed before; but it was because he was sick and suffering and lonely that I felt so troubled about him. But when he goes again I will bear it like a Southern soldier's wife. You will see it, sister."

"That is right, my daughter," said Mr. Cameron, approvingly. "Then indeed I shall have cause to rejoice that in my child a Southern soldier has found sympathy, encouragement, and help; then I shall never regret that I did not insist upon Willie's waiting for a wife until he had ceased to be a soldier."

When Uncle John returned to town, Mr. Cameron accompanied him, and they went together to the cottage. Mr. Cameron's mind was now bent on having Grace and Agnes at the Hall, and since he could not insist upon it openly, as he wanted to do, he determined to try and gain the child's consent unconsciously. She was still on the sofa where Uncle John had left her in the morning, but disclaimed the idea of being sick, and said that she was only tired.

Mr. Cameron seated himself by her, and said, pleasantly:

"Agnes, how would you like for yourself and your mother to come to the Hall and stay some weeks with us? It would do you both good, and as to ourselves it would be an act of kindness to us, for Julia and I will be very lonely next week, when Willie and Eva are gone."

"I would like it very much indeed, Mr. Cameron."

Mr. Cameron! how formal and frigid it sounded in the ears of the man who longed to fold the child to his heart and lavish upon her a father's love! Grace saw in his face the painful revulsion of feeling, and thought of the strange fatality that seemed to mark every footstep of her way, and continually to bring her face to face with conflicting claims and opposing duties. It pained her thus to seem to interpose a barrier to the love and caresses ready to be lavished upon her child, and she felt that she would probably be regarded as only obstinate where she knew herself to be self-sacrificing; but above all other claims, and paramount to all other duties, she considered the happiness of her blind child, and she determined to persist in what she felt assured would best promote it.

Again Mr. Cameron asked:

"And you will agree to go to the Hall, Agnes, if your mother will consent?"

"For how long a time, Mr. Cameron?"

"Just as long as you choose to stay."

"I would like to be there very much as long as I am too tired to play on the organ, but I must come back just as soon as I am well enough for that."

She paused a moment, and her face brightened as she added, with the unrestrained freedom with which she was accustomed to express her wishes to him:

"I tell you what I would like very much indeed, Mr. Cameron. I would like for you to move my organ to the Hall, and then I would be willing to stay just as long as you would like to have me."

"My child," said her mother, "you do not know what you ask. You have no idea of the trouble that it would cost to remove that organ to the Hall."

"I did not know, mother," she answered, "that it would be any more trouble to move my organ than a grand piano. I do not wish to trouble Mr. Cameron, but I was only thinking how pleasant it would be to stay at the Hall if the organ was there. Then if you would stay with me, I would rather stay there than to live at the cottage."

This was quite sufficient for Mr. Cameron, who said immediately:

"Never mind the trouble, Agnes. If it is practicable it shall be done. Perhaps Uncle John can devise some way to do it. Whenever my girls get into any difficulty they always send for him, and he generally contrives to help them out of it."

"Agnes," said Uncle John, "are you willing to trust me to take your organ to pieces and put it up again?"

"Take it to pieces, Uncle John!" she exclaimed, in dismay.

"Yes, daughter, there is no other way to remove it."

"Then it must not be done," she said, decidedly. "Suppose, Uncle John, that you should take it to pieces, and could not put it together again, what should I do?"

"You would do without it, my daughter," he answered, laughing at her evident alarm; "there would be no help for it."

"And surely, Uncle John, surely you would not pull it down without knowing whether or not you could build it up again!"

"No, Agnes, certainly not," he answered, seeing that he had awakened apprehensions which he could not so easily lull. "You are not afraid to trust me, are you, Agnes?"

"No—sir—" she replied, with hesitation, and in a tone of anxiety and doubt which contradicted her words; "but I believe,

Uncle John, that I would rather wait awhile before having it moved. I will go to the Hall and stay until I get well, and then come home to the organ."

"But Mr. Cameron and Julia will be disappointed," replied Uncle John, seeing that here was an insurmountable obstacle in the way of Mr. Cameron's plans. "They want the organ at the Hall, so that they can enjoy your music. Now if I assure you that I will not remove a single part of it until I am sure that I can put it back again, will you trust me then?"

"Did you ever take an organ to pieces, Uncle John?"

"No, never."

"Then," she said, with a nervous apprehension that she vainly endeavored to hide, and at the same time with a feeling of self-reproach at her unwillingness to trust him, "please, Uncle John, don't touch it. I am not,—I mean I don't want to be afraid to trust you, but I would rather not have it moved just now."

"Very well, my daughter," he answered, "just as you please."

But Agnes was ill at ease. Accustomed always to yield to the slightest expression of Uncle John's wishes, she felt that she had now not only resisted him, but had, at the same time, shown distrust of him. She could not see his face to tell whether or not she had offended him, and her fears had imparted to the tone of his reply a coldness which existed only in her imagination.

Nothing more was said, and presently she asked, timidly, and looking as if she were just ready to cry:

"Uncle John, is it very wrong for me to do so?"

"To do what, my daughter?"

"To be afraid for you to take down my organ. Oh, Uncle John!" she said, earnestly and apologetically, "if you only knew what an organ is to a blind child you would forgive me, you would not be angry with me."

"Angry with you, child! why, I never thought of such a thing. No, Agnes, the removal of the organ was proposed to give you pleasure, but if instead it is to give you pain and anxiety, of course I prefer not to do it. So come, don't think any more about it. You shall go to the Hall, and whenever you want the organ there and are willing to trust me, I will remove it."

"Thank you, Uncle John," she said, much relieved. "Perhaps some of these days I would like to have it there, but not now."

"Grace," said Mr. Cameron, "when may I have Agnes?"

"Now, sir," she answered, "if you wish it and she will consent to go without me. Indeed I would prefer that she should go home with you. She is not well, and the arrangements that I shall be obliged to make within the next few days will keep me

so busy that I will not be able to give her the attention that she may require."

"Will you go, Agnes?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you must go at once, so as to get home before sunset."

"I must first say good-by to the organ. You will let me do that, Mr. Cameron, won't you?"

"Yes, but it must not be either a long or a sad farewell, for you will play again in a very few days."

But his injunction was either unheeded or forgotten. It was indeed a farewell, such a one as she might have played if she had never again expected to awaken its music; and after waiting as long as he possibly could, Mr. Cameron was at length obliged abruptly to end the strain. On their way home, he said to her:

"Agnes, my daughter, I don't like for you to call me Mr. Cameron. It sounds cold and formal. You call Uncle John, uncle; why not give me some affectionate title, too? why not call me Uncle Henry,—or grandfather? I believe that I like that better. How would you like to call me grandfather?"

"I don't think it would do very well, sir," she answered, laughing; "for grandfathers have to be old men, and Uncle John says that you are not so old as he is. Oh, no, sir, you are not old enough to be my grandfather, and it would sound ridiculous to call you so."

"You are very much mistaken, my child. I am quite old enough for that, and I think I would like to be called so very much. Suppose you try it."

"For what, Mr. Cameron?"

"Simply because, as I told you just now, it is more affectionate."

"Do you think it would make me love you any better?"

"I do not know that it would, but I might fancy that it did."

"No, sir; no name could sound better to me than Mr. Cameron, for whenever I hear it, it makes me think of patience and kindness to a blind child, who is not even a relation."

"Have you never wanted relatives, Agnes? Have you never felt lonely when you thought that you had nobody but your mother, no father, brother, sister, uncle, or aunt?"

"When I was a very little child I used to wish that I had a father to love me, as other children had, and brothers and sisters to play with me, and I wondered that I had not, for it would seem that a blind child ought to have more relatives than anybody else; but I have not wanted them since I have known and learned to love you and your daughters, and Uncle John. In you, I did not have the name of relatives, but I had everything

else. Do you think, Mr. Cameron," she asked, earnestly, "that I could possibly love you any better than I do if you were my uncle, or even my grandfather, as you want me to call you?"

"I don't know, my child. You might not love me more, but I think the feeling would be different. Suppose now that I were really and truly your grandfather, don't you believe that you would feel a little nearer to me than you do now; would feel that you had a greater claim upon me, and that I was bound to take care of you?"

"I could not feel any nearer to you than I do now, Mr. Cameron; and as to your being bound to take care of me, I only know," she said, with childish simplicity and trust, "that if my mother should die, you and Uncle John would take care of me. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes, my darling! So long as I live you shall never be entirely orphaned. Agnes, I expect a great deal of pleasure from having you with me at the Hall."

"You mean, sir, that you expect to give me a great deal. I cannot give pleasure to anybody except by my music, and you have no organ at the Hall."

"I love your music, Agnes, but I love still better to talk to you and have you with me, and I intend to make you my companion. You shall ride with me, and walk with me, and I will do all that I can to make you contented and happy."

"It only needs kindness, Mr. Cameron, to make me contented, and everybody at the Hall is so affectionate to me that I cannot be otherwise than happy there. Yes, sir, I expect to have a pleasant, happy visit, and if I only had my organ I should not care if I did not go back to the cottage any more."

When they reached the Hall, Agnes was languid and tired. She asked permission to lie down on the sofa, and was soon fast asleep.

"Julia," said Mr. Cameron, "if that child's organ is not brought here she will not be contented three days, and yet the bare mention of taking it to pieces makes her wretched. I wish that nothing had been said about it."

"It might yet be done, papa, without her knowing it. Is Uncle John certain that he can rebuild it? It would indeed be a calamity if he should find that he could not. Agnes would grieve herself to death."

"Yes, he seems sure of that, but she will not consent at all to his trying it."

"Never mind, we will not ask her. Uncle John and I will arrange all that when he comes to-morrow, and she shall be spared all anxiety about it. If we are expeditious, I hope that

the first time she wishes for it she will find it at the Hall ready for use."

After awhile Willie and Eva came in, and Willie said :

"Who occupies the invalid's sofa now ? It seems, indeed, to have no rest. This time, however, I am glad to see that it is not an invalid, but only Agnes asleep upon it."

"Yes, it is Agnes," said Julia, "but an invalid too. Look at her cheeks, Willie ; she has a fever."

"If her mother had thought so," said Mr. Cameron, "she would not have sent her. She thought it was only languor and debility, and that the country air would be good for her. I do trust," he said, looking at her earnestly, "that she is not going to be very sick."

Julia looked first at her father and then at Agnes, and thought :

"Sometimes we are permitted to grasp the blessings that we crave, only to teach us that the comfort that we expected is not in them, and the hopes that we built upon their possession must have, for their fulfillment, a more solid foundation than belongs to anything earthly."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE next morning, when Julia met her father, she said :

"Papa, Agnes is sick and needs her mother. I will not send for her, for that might alarm her, but if you will stay with Agnes, I will go for her myself."

"And bring the physician too, Julia. I cannot help feeling anxious about the child."

Julia went off, and her father took his seat by Agnes's couch. He watched her rapid breathing and flushed cheeks, and tried to argue himself into the belief that apprehension, from so slight a cause, was both unnecessary and foolish, but he could neither subdue nor control his anxiety.

After awhile, Julia returned with Grace and the physician, who only laughed at their fears, prescribed some simple remedy, and went away, leaving them, if not altogether reassured, at least willing to believe that fear and alarm were quite useless.

The attention of the household was now divided between Agnes and Eva, who was rapidly approaching the time when she was to bid adieu to her childhood's home ; and although she

tried hard to comfort herself with the thought that she was only going away for a little while, still she could not forget that it was a virtual farewell to her father's house, which could never again be the home that it once was, first in her affections, paramount in her thoughts. Henceforth, another must divide with it her love and care. Julia looked forward with keenest pain to the approaching separation, the first that the sisters had ever known. She thought with dread of her loneliness, how she should miss the child who had been all her life a part of her daily thought and daily care, and whose pleasure and comfort she was as much accustomed to consult in her plans and purposes as she was that of her father. She remembered, too, that to Eva's sprightliness and vivacity she was indebted not only for much of happiness, but also for all the sparkle of her own life, and she felt a shrinking dread of the void in the house and in her heart, which she knew that Eva's departure would make. She tried so to busy herself with Agnes as to shut out the thought of the trial that awaited her, but it weighed upon her like a horrible nightmare. She nursed the child with unremitting tenderness and care, but all the while her heart ached with the thought of Eva.

The days passed wearily with Agnes, whose disease was a low form of fever, wasting in its effects, but without pain, and presenting no alarming symptom. She was lonely, and no entertainment that her mother could devise amused or interested her. She had never been seriously sick before, and in all her life, Grace had never felt that her child so needed eyes. Dolls, flowers, and picture-books, that for any other child would have varied the tedious monotony, possessed no interest for her; and sometimes, after her mother had read to her and told her stories until both mind and ear were wearied, she would say, with a plaintive sigh:

"I am so tired, mother, so tired of darkness!"

And the mother listened with shivering dread to the mournful plaint, the first that she had ever heard her utter.

Uncle John had worked perseveringly and successfully to give Agnes a pleasant surprise, and when she had been several days at the Hall, he was standing one evening, alone before the organ, contemplating with quiet satisfaction the result of his labor, and picturing her glad astonishment when he should tell her what he had done.

"Is it finished, Uncle John?" asked Julia, coming into the room.

"Yes, daughter, it is done; and won't our blind child be glad?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, absently, and with a sigh.

"Poor daughter!" said Uncle John. "You are thinking of Eva now. I am sorry for you, for you will be lonely indeed."

"Eva has not been many minutes out of my thoughts in the past few weeks, Uncle John, but I was not thinking of her at that moment. I was thinking of Agnes, and her mother, and papa, and you, Uncle John. Sorely will we all miss the blind child!"

"What!" he exclaimed, with a sudden start. "What are you saying, Julia? what do you mean?"

"I mean, Uncle John, that Agnes is very, very sick."

"When did she become so much worse?" he asked, anxiously. "Why didn't you send for me?"

"She seems no worse now than she has been all the time. I have been afraid from the beginning that she would never get well."

"Foolish child!" said Uncle John, kindly, and very much relieved, "how you startled me! I thought that Agnes must have grown suddenly worse. But you are mistaken, Julia. You have no experience in these low types of fever, and do not know how much depression and exhaustion there may be, without any real danger. The doctor does not say that she is very sick, nor do I think so. Oh, no! good nursing, such as she gets from her mother and yourself, will bring her safely through."

"I trust so, but I am very anxious; and I could not help sighing just now when I saw you smile in anticipation of her delight, for the thought flashed upon me then that Agnes might perhaps never touch those keys again."

"Oh, Julia!" he exclaimed, "don't talk so. The thought of Eva's departure has depressed you, and this makes you take a gloomy view of Agnes's case. But cheer up, now! She will yet, for many a year to come, make this old Hall tremble with that deep pedal bass. Come, get your cloak and bonnet, and let us take a walk. You have stayed in that sick-room so much, and have withal been so troubled, that you are almost sick yourself. Air and exercise will do you good."

Uncle John was determined, if possible, to divert her thoughts both from Agnes and Eva, and so he said, cheerfully, as they left the house:

"Tell me when you heard from Charles, and what he says of himself and his affairs. Time was, Julia, when you were dependent upon me for tidings from him, but now the case is reversed, and if I want to hear from him I must come to you."

Their talking was all of Charles; but Julia, unlike Eva, lived not altogether in the future, and much of the present mingled

both in her thoughts and conversation. She viewed things in their true relations, and saw them as they really were. She neither ignored nor forgot the danger and uncertainty around her, but fully realized that she must encounter much anxiety, suspense, and perhaps much actual sorrow, before that goal to which she looked forward could be reached. The only condition on which she had consented to marry Charles in the existing state of things involved so much of suffering and danger to him, that she never allowed herself to think of it; so that when she thought of happiness, it was always as if she were looking across a black, yawning chasm, which must be crossed, before the pure and peaceful light could be reached on the other side. She struggled to attain a patient serenity, a trusting hope, but beyond this she did not aspire. Sometimes that serenity was ruffled by deep anxiety, and that hope, losing for the moment its supporting, anchor-like power, was swayed to and fro by torturing fears; but Julia was a Christian, and therefore always patient and submissive, and generally even now wore that expression of calm, quiet cheerfulness which was her wont.

"When will you see Charles again?" asked Uncle John.

"Ah, sir! I do not know. There is no definite time in the future for that pleasure. We will not see each other often," she added, with a sigh, "while the war lasts, even if that should be for years. We have agreed, Uncle John, not to tempt each other away from duty, and except in some great and unexpected emergency, I shall never ask him to leave his post to come to me for a single day. He will come whenever he can do so consistently with his duty, and, fortunately for my peace, I have confidence enough in him to believe that he will never either desert his post or forget me."

"A priceless faith, my daughter, nor is it misplaced. I believe that the end will prove that you have not overestimated him.. I wish," he added, kindly, "that you two children could have your happiness sealed as speedily as Willie and Eva. This long waiting will be wearisome to both of you, and Charles will not bear it as patiently and submissively as you will."

"Perhaps not, but bear it he must, in some fashion or other, because it is right, and he has promised to do it. He understands, Uncle John, that unless he is ill or wounded, and requires a wife's nursing care, we are not to be married during the war. He acquiesced in my decision, and I do not think will ever propose that it should be reversed."

They walked in the grove until it was quite dark, and the keen, cold air sent them back to the house, where they went immediately to Agnes's room.

Languor and exhaustion were plainly written upon her face, and when Uncle John asked how she felt, she answered, wearily :

“Tired, Uncle John,—oh ! so tired !”

“She is tired of her position,” said her mother, “and I cannot remedy it. I took her up just now and seated her in the arm-chair, but that exhausted her ; then I propped her with pillows, but that was not comfortable ; and now I don’t know what to do for her.”

“But I do,” said Uncle John, lifting her gently in his arms and seating himself before the fire in a large rocking-chair. “Now, spread a blanket over her, and I will hold her so comfortably that she will be asleep in five minutes.”

The change of position was a great relief, and nestling her head against Uncle John’s shoulder, Agnes verified his prediction, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. Julia stole out quietly, and the mother and Uncle John silently watched the child. The room was dark, except as it was now and then lightened by a fitful blaze of the decaying fire, whose uncertain glare only served to sharpen the outlines of the thin face, and to deepen, for the instant, the fever-glow upon the cheeks. The quick eye of the mother detected in an instant the gentle touch which Uncle John laid upon Agnes’s wrist, and, with her anxieties awakened in a moment, she asked, quickly :

“Has she more fever ?”

The pulse bounded as he had never felt it before, and with difficulty controlling his voice and his countenance, he replied, calmly :

“Her pulse is not so quiet as it was this morning. She has more fever than she had then.”

And then, afraid of more searching questions which he did not wish to answer, he added :

“We must not talk now. Let her sleep if she can.”

No more was said, and they kept their silent watch ; Uncle John finding himself unwillingly partaking of Julia’s fears, and Grace oppressed with the same vague, undefined dread, which had tortured her ever since the first morning that Agnes’s hands had fallen listlessly at her side before the organ. Presently Mr. Cameron joined the silent group, and seating himself beside Uncle John, looked first at the child, then at the mother, and then at Uncle John, as if with a vain hope of reading something in their faces which might contradict his own anxious fears.

They sat thus for some time, when Agnes suddenly awoke with a start and a shudder, and asked, in a frightened tone :

“Where am I ?”

"In Uncle John's arms, my daughter," he replied, clasping her hand.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "I must have been dreaming; but I thought that I was in such a cold, damp place, talking to Mr. George."

"Hush, daughter!" said Uncle John, not wishing either her thoughts or conversation to be directed in that painful channel. "Be quiet now, and go to sleep again; you did not finish your nap."

"I cannot, Uncle John; I am wide awake now. I was so frightened! I would rather not go to sleep at all than to have such dreams. I never dreamed before of seeing anything; but I actually thought that I saw him, and that was what frightened me so."

Uncle John could plainly feel the quick throbbing of her heart, and fearing the effect of this excitement, he tried to soothe and quiet her, but in vain. She would talk, and there was an unnatural, nervous hurry in the tone of her voice, as she said:

"Poor Mr. George! I wonder what has become of him. Do you know, Uncle John?"

"I have never heard from him, Agnes, since we left Richmond."

Her mind was now fixed upon Mr. George, and with childish pertinacity she pursued her questions and vain conjectures, as to where he was, and if he had made friends and was happier than he used to be. Neither her mother nor Mr. Cameron spoke, but received in silent agony every stab of the unconscious child. At last she started up, and exclaimed, hurriedly:

"Mother! Uncle John, where is mother? Is she here?"

"Yes, Agnes," she answered, taking her hand, "your mother is here."

"Mother, I want you to write to Mr. George for me now this very minute. I promised to do it, and ought to have done it before. I am afraid he will think that I don't keep my promises. Will you, mother?"

Grace could not answer a word, and looked ready to faint. Uncle John came to her relief, and said:

"It is night now, Agnes, and your mother is so tired nursing you all day, that she could not write a letter. Wait until to-morrow, daughter, won't you?"

"Yes, sir, if mother is too tired to do it now. But will you promise to write to-morrow, mother?"

"Wait until to-morrow comes, my child," she almost gasped.

"Agnes," said Uncle John, "if you are well enough to-mor-

row to tell me what to write, I will write a letter for you to Mr. George. Won't that do? Your mother is not able to do it, she has too much to do for you."

"Yes, that will do, Uncle John," she answered, satisfied with the promise.

"And now, Agnes," he said, "I have promised to gratify you; you must do something for me in return."

"I am willing, Uncle John. What is it?"

"You must lie still and not speak another word, and try to go to sleep."

"I will try," she replied, settling herself in his arms and leaning her head against his breast.

Again they sat a long time in silence. After awhile Mr. Cameron, thinking she was asleep, and wishing to judge of her fever, laid his hand upon one of hers that was resting upon the arm of the chair. In a moment she passed her other hand rapidly over his, and said:

"This is Mr. Cameron's hand, and it is so cool and pleasant. Uncle John, my hands and my head are burning up. What makes me feel so hot in such cold weather?"

"Because you have a fever, Agnes. You are sick, and the more you talk the worse it is for you; and that is the reason why we try to keep you quiet."

"But, Uncle John, I must do something when I am awake. If I could see, I would lie still, because then I could look around and have plenty to amuse me without moving or speaking a word; but now it is so lonely to lie here wide awake and in the dark, and not even talk. Oh, if I only had my organ!"

"But, Agnes, you could not play upon it if you had it. You are not able to sit up now."

"Still, Uncle John, it would be pleasant to know that I was near it. Sometimes I am almost sorry that I came to the Hall. It is true, I would rather be sick here than at home, because I have so many kind nurses; but I am sorry that I left my organ. If I had known that I would be away from it so long, I would not have come."

"How would you like to have it here, Agnes?"

"I wish that it was here; but, Uncle John," she added, earnestly, "please don't try to move it."

"I will not, Agnes. It is already here."

It needed Uncle John's firm, strong grasp to keep the sick child from leaping out of his arms upon the floor.

"Already here, and built up again, and ready to play on?" she exclaimed in delight.

"Yes, all ready to play on, Agnes, and only waiting for you

to get well enough to touch those pedal notes that you and I love so well."

It was a pleasant excitement; but Uncle John knew that it was not less dangerous for all that. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks glowed, and her heart beat quick and hard; but the unnatural strength was that of the treacherous fever which wasted and consumed, even while it seemed to supply power and energy. In a little while the reaction came, and she sank back almost lifeless in Uncle John's arms.

"Send for the doctor," he whispered to Mr. Cameron.

The physician was sent for, and he came with all speed; but it seemed to the anxious watchers that they waited for him for hours. He said nothing, but it needed no words to express the uneasiness so plainly written on his countenance; and when he intimated his intention of spending the night, the satisfaction afforded by his presence was more than counterbalanced by the conviction of the danger which made it necessary. That was a weary night, and before morning Agnes was unconscious.

To Grace and Julia this result, however distressing, was not unexpected, for both had feared it from the beginning, although they scarcely knew why; but Eva had never had one anxious thought about Agnes, and when she came into the room the next morning and saw her lying motionless, with the ice bound upon her head, and her mother sitting beside her like a statue, the possibility that Agnes might die flashed upon her for the first time, and her distress was augmented by the suddenness of the blow.

The day wore on; another night came, but there was no change. Agnes needed nothing. It would have been a relief to have had something to do; but there were no wants to be supplied, no pains to be assuaged, no little offices of gentleness and love which, even if not necessary, are yet so acceptable to the sick. On one side of the couch sat the mother, and on the other was the grandfather. Each held a little hand, and looked with hopeless distress upon the child whose life, however necessary to their happiness, they were powerless to retain. All day and far into the night she had lain as motionless as the dead; but in the depth of midnight the mother felt a slight tremor of the hand that she held, and then it was suddenly withdrawn from her grasp. Mr. Cameron released the other, and both wandered feelingly over the coverlid, as if arranging the stops of the organ.

"Agnes, my darling," exclaimed her mother, "speak to me."

The child heard not; and presently she sang, in a low voice, her hands the while seeming to accompany her on the organ, a simple hymn-tune to the words which, years ago, had pictured to her infant mind her first bright dream of heaven. Mr. Cameron's

tears fell fast, as in the deep stillness of midnight he heard, from the lips of the blind child, who was even then upon the threshold of the world of light:

“No midnight shade, no clouded sun,
But sacred, high, eternal noon!”

And this was all. She knew nothing that was going on around her; and when the last word died upon her lips, she was again in that same profound and dreamless sleep from which her momentary glimpse of light and heaven had awakened her. Earnestly the mother watched and prayed for one word of recognition, eagerly she listened for the word “mother,” but it never came; longingly she gazed upon the sealed lips, and hoped that if she might not hear the sound, she might at least see them move as if trying to pronounce her name. But she longed and prayed in vain. The weary hours dragged on heavily, bringing with them neither change nor hope.

Night waned, and the cold, gray dawn struggled dimly into the room, and contended with the flickering glare of the dying night-lamp. Then, clear and bright and cloudless rose the morning sun, flooding earth and sky with that light which is at once the glory and the life of this lower world. It streamed full through the window upon the face of the dying child; but the darkness that veiled her eyes, no earthly light could penetrate. Plaintive and weary was the voice which said:

“Mother, come close, and let me touch your cheek. Is it very dark to-night?”

“The night is gone, my darling, and it is bright, glorious morning. What made you think that it was night?”

“Because it is so dark, so much darker than it ever was before. Oh, mother,” she added, with a shudder, “I am so blind!”

And then in her restless tossing she murmured the words of the prayer that she loved: “Lighten my darkness, O Lord;” and deep and fervent was the voiceless Amen in the mother’s heart.

It was twilight. Agnes had been quiet for hours, so quiet that Uncle John occasionally felt the ebbing pulse to see if life still lingered. All at once she opened her eyes wide, not with the dull, vacant stare of the blind, but as if she were gazing into the infinite depths. Then a bright smile of glad surprise and joy lighted up her face, as she exclaimed:

“Mother, I am not blind now! I see, oh! I see the glorious light!”

And with the word “light” upon her lips, the earthly night of the blind child passed away forever in the light of eternal and unclouded day!

Her “*darkness was lightened now!*”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AGNES was gone, and with her the light had gone out in her mother's heart. There was silence now in Cameron Hall. The organ was silent: there was no longer any childish touch to awaken its chords. The mother's room was silent: there was no child there to be instructed or amused. The mother's heart and voice were silent: the business of her life was done. There was, however, no overwhelming grief, no sinking down in hopeless despair. Quietly she surrendered her last comfort, patiently she submitted to the sundering of her last tie.

Nor was Agnes only missed by her mother, and others, to whom she was scarcely less dear. Joe too missed her, although he could neither have defined his feeling nor explained its cause. He never asked for her; but for many days after she was laid away in her grave, he took his accustomed place at the organ, and waited hour after hour for her to come. There was something very touching in this patient and fruitless waiting of the unconscious idiot for the return of one who could never come again; and as he stood by the silent instrument, with his face turned toward the door by which he expected her to enter, his whole appearance and attitude were as expressive of sorrow as was the more conscious and evident grief of the rest of the family. He seemed to miss something, to want something, almost to hope for something, but he could neither have told nor did he know himself what it was; and when hour after hour had passed, and still she came not, he would go away, and, resuming his wandering habits of old, would roam all day over the plantation and through the grove. Repeated disappointment at last taught him his lesson, and he ceased to go to the organ, and soon he learned to pass it by with his accustomed vacant stare, as if he had never known its use nor heard its tones, and the recollection of the blind child soon faded entirely away from the feeble memory of the idiot boy.

One evening, about sunset, Julia went into Grace's room. She was sitting by the window looking out upon the western sky, where the sun was going down in a blaze of glory. She did not hear the opening door, and Julia paused upon the threshold and looked with a feeling almost of awe upon that same expression, that same intent, penetrating gaze that was upon Agnes's face

as she passed away. Presently Julia saw a bright smile, and then she went up to her, and asked, gently :

“What is it, Grace? What are you thinking of?”

“Of Agnes, Julia. I was looking at that blaze of light, and thinking how she once longed to know what light was. Now that sunshine, glorious as it seems to us, is as darkness to what she sees! Oh, Julia, if heaven were nothing but light, it would still be heaven to my blind child!”

“Then, Grace, you are willing to give her up?”

“Willing, Julia! Is the mother willing to have her child’s eyes unsealed? Willing to open her prison doors and send her out of darkness into the blessed sunshine? Willing to see the long shadows of a hopeless night flee before the rising sun? If so, then I am willing to give up Agnes, and not willing only, but more than that. I am glad, so glad that the day has at last dawned upon her!”

“And yet, Grace, you seemed to cling to her with a nervous grasp, as if you dreaded losing her above all other calamities.”

“And so I did. She was my thought, my life, my light. But the fear was a selfish one, and now that she is gone, I can rise above my own sorrow. I forget the night of my own heart, and the darkness of my own life, in the thought that where she is there shall be no night, no darkness!”

Weeks passed. The bleak winds of March, laden with the last icy breath of winter, were lulled, and the soft skies and genial suns of April were rapidly clothing the earth in the green mantle of resurrected vegetation. Eva and Willie had left a few days after the death of Agnes, and the weekly letter which came, full of the love of that young heart, large enough and warm enough to form strong new ties without weakening the old ones,—this, together with the letters from Walter and Charles, were the only variety in the quiet life of the Hall. Uncle John was if possible a more frequent visitor there than ever. He missed his daily visit to the cottage, and quite as much as this he missed the organ, whose deep tones he was accustomed to hear as he passed along the streets, and for which he still frequently found himself involuntarily listening. Next to her mother, he missed Agnes more than any one else. Mr. Cameron felt in the child’s death the bitterness of disappointment in having a coveted treasure snatched from him as soon as he had possessed himself of it; but to Uncle John, as to the mother, there was a painful vacuum, the absence of something to which he had long been daily accustomed, and which had become almost as much a part of his life as the very air that he breathed. When he and Grace were together, Agnes formed their only theme of conversation. They

loved to talk of her; and to remember her music was like its own echo, sweet yet sad, a pleasure and yet a pain too, because the birth of the echo necessitates the death of its parent-sound.

It was late in April, and one evening, about sunset, Uncle John and Julia were sitting upon the porch reading letters from Charles and Eva. They were both quite absorbed, and were startled as the sound of the organ stole out upon the quiet air. It had never been opened since Agnes's death, but silent and lonely it stood a sad memorial of the child with whom it was so identified. They looked at each other for a moment, and then arose simultaneously, with a vague, undefined hope of realizing the impossible, and finding the child seated there as she used to be. But it was only her mother, who had been drawn there from a desire to be near Agnes, and a sort of shadowy idea that there, if anywhere on earth, the spirit of the child would love to linger. In life the music of the organ had been the medium through which she expressed her feelings, and it was a sweet maternal fancy which now imagined that it might still be her voice speaking to her mother from the spirit-world. Strangely enough she could not remember the last strain that she had heard Agnes play. That was a farewell, and in her heart now there was a welcome instead of a farewell. She felt as if she and Agnes were now united after a long separation, and the strain that she played was the one in which the child had poured out her thanksgiving for her safe return, after her long absence, to her home and her mother. Her listeners had expected a dirge for the dead, but they heard instead a strain as bright and cheerful as Agnes ever played when her heart was lightest and happiest.

"What does it mean?" was the expression upon both faces as they entered the room, though neither spoke. Grace interpreted the look, and replied:

"Agnes seems very close to me now, and I am happy!"

From that day, whenever the mother felt most lonely, she went to the organ, and it became to her a companion and comforter. Much of the music that Agnes used to play was engraved upon her memory, and as it was no borrowed harmony, but emphatically the language of the child's own heart, no wonder that the mother felt specially near her when she was at the organ.

Time passed on, and spring had merged into summer. The country was momentarily quiet, but it was only the lull that precedes the storm. The two great armies who were about again to make a battle-ground of Virginia soil, and Richmond their point of contention, now threatened each other, but had not yet ventured upon an open battle. With bitterness intensified by former disappointment, the North was now more determined than

ever to plant the stars and stripes upon the Confederate capital. For months she had prosecuted her plan with vigor and energy. Men and money had been lavished without stint, and the marshaled hosts were now placed under a leader whose name alone was considered a prestige of victory. Satisfied with the disastrous result of the attempt to reach Richmond by Manassas, General McClellan determined to try another route, and, taught by the experience of his predecessors in command that he had to contend against a foe neither insignificant nor cowardly, he resolutely shut his ears to the urgings of an impatient government and the clamors of a captious press, and refused to take one decided step toward the grand result until he considered success beyond a peradventure.

Meanwhile the South listened calmly to the boasting threats of overwhelming numbers and speedy annihilation, and, while straining every nerve and exerting every energy to meet the coming foe, she still awaited the result with a quiet trust and a resolute courage.

And now the heart of the nation stood still as it awaited in breathless suspense the tremendous blow. All eyes were turned to Richmond, and all knew, or imagined that they knew, how bloody and desperate would be the impending battle, how fearful and determined would be the struggle for the coveted city.

Hopedale and the surrounding country, though still debatable ground, was not occupied by either army. Every soldier belonging to both sides was at the front, and there were no stragglers wearing either uniform, to remind the quiet citizens that there was war in the land.

Just at this time Willie and Eva returned. The joy of the latter at being at home again was far more than counterbalanced by the pain of approaching separation from her husband, who, now entirely restored to health and strength, was on his way, full of animation and hope, to resume his soldier life. He only allowed himself two days at the old Hall, so full of pleasant memories and so identified with the one great happiness of his life; and on the morning of the third, true to her promise, without one complaining word, without one expressed wish that he might stay with her only one day longer, and with a self-control that she had never attained before, his young wife sent him away.

"Don't forget the miniature, Eva," he said, as he was busy with his preparations on the morning of his departure. "Don't let me go without that."

She put a ribbon through the little gold locket and fastened it round his neck.

"Like you, and yet not like you, Eva," he said, looking long and searchingly, first at the daguerreotype, and then into her face. "It has your features, but it wants the expression, the soul, that is in the original. However, this is better than nothing, and will comfort me more than aught else could do except your own self."

He was gone, nor was there, after his departure, a single murmur or a complaint of the hardship of separation; and Julia looked with mingled surprise and admiration at the sister, so lately an impulsive, unrestrained child, now a self-controlled, submissive woman.

Weeks passed by, but brought not the expected battle. The two nations were weary with expectation, and while they dreaded the bloody fray, they were at the same time surprised and disappointed at the unaccountable delay. But at length the tidings came. Day after day the combat raged, and the telegraph wires flashed the news of successive battles and the continuous repulses of the Federal army. In an agony of hope and fear, of suspense and dread, the nation awaited the final issue. Thousands crowded the telegraph offices day after day, first to hear the result of the last battle, and then with sickening fear to ask the price of victory. But not until it was all over, not until the contest for Richmond had been for this time also abandoned, did the wires begin to bring their messages of sorrow and of joy, and then Uncle John brought to the hearts at the Hall, worn out with waiting and watching, the blessed tidings of the safety of their loved ones.

A few days after, came long letters from Willie and Walter. Their fearful descriptions of the scenes of blood and carnage through which they had passed unhurt, while they curdled the blood of those who read them, at the same time awakened a deeper gratitude for the mercy which had spared them where so many others had fallen. Charles wrote only a hasty and almost illegible scrawl, scribbled with a pencil in the hospital, during one of the brief intervals between his duties. He said that he had work enough to keep him busy day and night as long as he could bear the strain and fatigue, but he promised to write again the first leisure moment.

Three weeks then passed away, bringing several letters from Walter and Willie, but neither letter nor message from Charles. Julia had waited until the days had lengthened into weeks, and these almost into a month, and now her suspense became intolerable. She did not express her fears to those at home, and she wrote to him as usual with no reference to her torturing anxiety, and only alluding to his silence as a necessary result of

his constant occupation, but she felt all the time well assured that this could not satisfactorily account for it.

She was standing one evening upon the porch looking out vacantly and absently upon the lawn. A vehicle drove in at the gate, but she did not notice it, for poor Julia felt now that nothing except that longed-for letter, which did not come, could excite even a passing interest or awaken a desire. As the vehicle approached the house, she saw, with surprise, that Uncle John was seated beside the driver, and then all at once an undefined dread seized her. Her eyes were riveted and her lips were sealed, and she neither moved nor spoke, but with a strange sort of fascination she watched, as two horsemen dismounted, and, assisted by Uncle John and the driver, lifted out of the carriage a mattress, on which was extended a form, whose wasted features and closed eyes convinced her that it was only Charles's lifeless body that they were bringing back to her.

As Uncle John passed by, he cast a compassionate glance upon her white face as she clung to the column for support, and when he had deposited his burden in the house, he returned to her, and without a question being asked or a word of explanation offered, he took her by the hand, and said, sadly:

"He is still alive, my daughter."

He then led her to Charles's couch. She could not tell whether it was sleep or exhaustion or unconsciousness, but he neither moved nor opened his eyes, as kneeling beside him she held his hand in a convulsive grasp, until at last he was so very quiet that her heart stood still with the thought that perhaps he might be already dead. But there was still a feeble pulse, and a gentle breathing, but beyond this not another sign of life. When the physician came, Julia saw, with a shudder, that well-remembered expression which his face had worn when he came that last night into Agnes's sick-room. She watched beside him all night, and the next morning, when her father and Uncle John insisted that she should take a few hours' rest, she begged that she might be allowed to remain, but at last yielded to their positive commands, after having exacted a promise that if any change should take place, she should be immediately summoned. She went to her room, but neither to sleep nor to rest. Every noise and every footstep that passed her door sent a thrill through her heart, and she felt that it was a mistaken kindness that had banished her from that room.

She had been gone a long time when Charles awoke from his stupor, and looked around. His eye wandered all over the room, and rested first upon Mr. Cameron and then upon Uncle John, but there was no recognition. There was evidently a painful but

an unsuccessful effort to think and to recollect, and then, without seeming conscious that he was asking a question, and, indeed, without apparent volition, he murmured almost inaudibly :

“Where am I?”

Mr. Cameron bent over the couch so that he might see him distinctly, as he answered :

“You are at Cameron Hall, Charles,—Julia’s home.”

There was a momentary gleam of intelligence in the eye as if he understood, but it was gone in an instant. The mind refused to act, and, with a heavy sigh of weariness, and an expression of pain upon his face, he closed his eyes again, and sank into his former stupor.

The physician had watched him with painful and eager interest, but when he saw the eyes close again, he said, in a low voice of disappointment and sorrow :

“I hoped that this was the crisis, and that he was about to rally. If he cannot be aroused from this stupor before midnight, I am afraid that he will then sink rapidly.”

“If that be so,” said Mr. Cameron, “I will not keep Julia away any longer. Poor daughter! poor daughter!”

He went to her room, and as soon as she saw him, Julia, whose nerves were strung to the highest pitch of excitement, sprang up, and with a stifled scream seized her father and clung to him for support. She asked no question, but looked inquiringly at him, and stood trembling and shivering.

“He is no worse, my daughter,” Mr. Cameron hastened to say, “but I have come to take you back to him.”

“Send for Mr. Derby, papa,” was her only reply.

Her father went out to do it, and she returned to Charles’s room.

There was no sleep that night at Cameron Hall. Physician and minister, as well as those more nearly interested, watched in anxious suspense as hour after hour dragged wearily by, and the dreaded time approached when the doctor had said that his fate would probably be sealed.

It was almost midnight when his eyes opened again, and this time they rested first on Julia’s face, and were riveted there. At first it was a vacant stare, but gradually her image seemed to impress itself upon his mind, and then, as if doubtful whether or not he was awake, he said :

“Julia!”

She pressed a kiss upon his fevered lips, as she answered :

“Charles!”

This was enough, and, quite contented, his eyes were closing again, when the physician whispered anxiously :

"Keep him awake. Don't let him sink into that stupor again. Everything depends upon it."

Vigorously and faithfully they worked under the physician's directions, until at last their efforts were crowned with success, and Charles was thoroughly awake and conscious. He asked no questions: there was no expression of surprise upon his face at finding himself at Cameron Hall, but his eye glanced from one to the other with unmistakable satisfaction, and finally rested upon Julia with unutterable tenderness.

He had been lying so for two hours. Julia was sponging his face and hands with ice-water, and he had been for some time looking intently at her, but had never spoken one word to her.

"Julia," he said, suddenly, "listen."

She bent down to listen to the feeble voice which said:

"I am about to die. Will you do something for me?"

"Yes, Charles," she whispered, "anything to comfort you."

"Let me leave you my name; let me die your husband. You promised it. Will you?"

"I will," she answered.

She explained his wishes to her father, and said:

"May I, papa? I am his wife already in all but the name."

"Yes, my daughter," he answered. "If it will comfort either of you I cannot, under the circumstances, object."

"Doctor," she whispered, "will it injure him? Will it—will it hasten his end?"

"No, Julia, I do not believe that it will."

That was a strangely solemn wedding in the depth of midnight at Cameron Hall. The bridal and the grave were in startling proximity, and instead of smiling faces and a festive scene, there were tearful eyes and aching hearts and hushed voices, for the young girl who knelt in crushing sorrow by that couch was about to become a bride, only that she might have the sad privilege of mourning as a widow. There was a meaning, a present significance in the words, "until death us do part," such as they seldom bear when uttered by the strong, manly voice of the self-reliant bridegroom, who, full of life and strength, feels himself able to redeem his promise to love, cherish, and protect. Now Death seemed to stand just before him; indeed, he appeared already to have laid his grasp upon him, and Charles thought with a bitter pang of the ties sundered almost with the breath that formed them; of the life surrendered just as it became immeasurably valuable.

Her promise was fulfilled, and on the threshold of the grave Julia had become Charles Beaufort's wife. The solemn wedding over, they resumed their sad and quiet watch, looking with anx-

ious earnestness into the doctor's face whenever he felt the pulse, and responding with a sigh of relief as they read there that the patient had not yet begun to sink. All night long he lay calm and motionless, but perfectly conscious, with his hand resting contentedly in Julia's nervous grasp. At daylight the doctor arose and motioned Mr. Cameron to follow him. Julia started in alarm, but when she looked at him, she saw something in his expression which completely reassured her.

"The crisis is over, sir," he said to Mr. Cameron, when they were out of hearing of the sick-room. "With careful nursing, and without a relapse, he will probably get well."

"Thank God! Thank God for Julia's sake!" was the father's earnest response.

He then went back to the door of Charles's room and beckoned to Julia. When she came out he led her into her own room and shut the door; then putting his arm around her, he drew her close up to his heart, but his trembling voice could only say:

"He is safe, my daughter."

There was no need to shut the door so that Charles might not hear her cry of joy. She said not one word, but, sinking upon her knees, her overcharged heart found its first relief in a flood of silent tears, and her father left her still kneeling and thanking God that she was not that moment a widow.

Charles's return to life was almost like a recall from the grave, and the gradual recovery of his faculties seemed rather like a resurrection of them from actual death than an awakening from a temporary suspension. It was several days before he asked a question, and there was something so like apathy in his speechless, motionless quiet, that Julia, while she could not but rely upon the doctor's assurance that he was doing well, still felt a half-defined dread that all could not yet be right. Had she realized how near extinction the vital spark had been, she would not have wondered that it should still have trembled and flickered, before it could again spring up into the clear, unwavering flame of a recovered life.

Julia had watched and nursed day and night for a week. None could take her place, and Charles was so weakened in mind and body that he did not now see what, at another time, would have caused him great anxiety. He did not seem to remember that she could be wearied, and he was always restless and unhappy when she was out of sight. The doctor had insisted so much upon quiet, and the absence of all excitement, that when Julia saw how unwilling he was for her to leave him, no entreaties could persuade her to take any rest. Medical skill and careful nursing had effected much for him during the past week, and though still entirely

prostrate, yet the disease was subdued; but care and anxiety, sleepless nights and days of toil, had left their impress upon Julia.

The sun had set after a parching August day, and she threw open all the blinds to admit the pleasant evening breeze. As she stood by the western window, looking out upon a magnificent sky, the light fell clearly and distinctly upon her face, and Charles saw, for the first time, how wan and wearied she looked.

"Come here, Julia," he said.

She sat down in her chair by his couch, but he said:

"Not there. Sit here close by me. I want to look at you."

She sat down on the bedside, and he gazed earnestly upon her face, so pale and tired looking.

"You are worn out," he said, "and I have done it. How long have I been here?"

"Just a week."

"Who has nursed me all that time,—you?"

"Everybody has done something for you," she answered, evasively.

"How many nights have you stayed with me?"

"I have been with you every night."

"And how many days have you been in this room?"

"Every day since you came."

"Now, Julia," he said, with something of his old earnestness and decision, "why did you do this? Why wear yourself out in doing for me what another might have done, if not so well as you, at least well enough? You have done wrong, Julia," he said, decidedly, "very wrong."

"And you are doing worse," she answered, "to become excited about it. The doctor insists upon your being kept perfectly quiet, and physicians and nurses, you know," she added, smiling, "must be obeyed. So I positively prohibit another word."

"But I must and will speak, Julia, when I see you looking as you do now, and know that I have caused it. If physicians and nurses must be obeyed," he added, with a wan smile, "husbands must be too. That was a part of your vow."

"And I am ready to fulfill it this moment if you will only be quiet. I will agree to do anything if you will not talk any more. I am so much afraid of a return of fever."

"Then promise not to stay in this room another night until I give you permission."

"Very well," she answered, "I consent if it will satisfy you. You are mistaken, however, as to the cause of my appearance.

- Distress and anxiety leave a more painful impress upon the face than bodily weariness. It is grief and suspense that you see, not

fatigue. However, I will obey your commands. I will not nurse you another night until you give me permission."

When she came in next morning, she still looked so weary and haggard, that he positively refused to allow her to do anything for him, but making her seat herself in the arm-chair, he sent for Eva, and asked her to relieve her sister that day.

"Which I would gladly have done long ago," she answered, "if sister would have consented, but she said it was a privilege and a pleasure that she could not resign to another."

Eva proved herself so good a nurse that Charles told her that she almost equaled her sister, and asked where she learned her skill.

"It does not require much skill," she answered. "It only needs to be very much interested in the patient to be a good nurse."

"That is a mistake, Eva," said Uncle John. "I was very much interested both in Willie and Charles, but I could not have nursed them as you girls did. I think that to be an efficient nurse, quiet and yet active, attentive yet not officious, is one of the most valuable talents which a man or woman can have, and one with which comparatively few are gifted. And, Eva, since Charles says that you have proved yourself such a nurse to-day, see here,—here is your reward!"

She sprang up, and seizing the letter eagerly, tore open the envelope.

"Charles," said Julia, "you must dismiss your nurse now. She cannot read that letter anywhere except by the side of Willie's sofa."

"Oh, yes I can," said Eva. "I can read it here very well."

"No," said Julia, "there is no reason why you should not read it there as you always do. Charles can spare you very well now, and I can wait on him while you are gone."

"Yes, my little sister," he said, "go read your letter, and when you have done, come back and tell us the news from Willie."

Eva hurried down stairs with her treasure, and after she was gone, Uncle John said:

"That child has disappointed me very much. I declare, Julia, she bears her separation with as much womanly fortitude as you yourself could do."

"Yes, sir," she answered, "she is very patient and submissive, and I sometimes wonder if she can be the same impetuous child that she was a year ago. And yet," she added, with a sigh, "although she is so lovely and gentle, and the discipline of the past few months has given strength and stability to her character, yet, Uncle John, I sometimes find myself longing for the gay, frolicsome child, unconscious of care and unacquainted with sor-

row, who used to make the old Hall ring with her gay laugh, and resound with her rushing step. Now she is as quiet as I am. Poor child!" she said, thoughtfully and sadly, "whenever I look at her I seem to see a shadow over her."

"Now, Julia," exclaimed Uncle John, "I am beginning to lose my patience with you. It is only of late that I have ever known you to indulge such gloomy fancies. Now, I don't know anybody whose future wears a brighter aspect, and is more full of promise than that child's."

"That is true, sir; but all our lives are overshadowed now. I sometimes think that it would be better if none of us expected a great deal of happiness, since there are so many causes at work around us to disappoint us. But Eva and Willie expect so much, and have painted their future in such glowing colors, that a shadow upon their life would be deeper and darker from contrast with their anticipations."

Grace now came into the room, and Charles calling her to him, said:

"Julia tells me that you too play on the organ. Will you do so for me now? It will be a sweet reminder of Agnes."

Grace acquiesced, and soon the music came rolling with tremulous sweetness into the room. To an invalid, who is weak though not suffering, and who is quiet and languid, there is nothing so soothing as low, sweet music; and organ music, so deep, so penetrating, so full of soul, reaches the heart as none other can, through the dull, heavy ear of sickness.

Charles closed his eyes, and the blind child seemed to be before him, and he felt almost as if the strain had wafted him to the spirit-land, where he had found Agnes again.

When it ceased, he opened his eyes, and said, regretfully:

"I am sorry that she is gone. I never realized before that sight and sound are so closely allied. I could scarcely have felt nearer that child or have seen her more distinctly if she had been sitting before me. What a sweet memorial of a friend is music! How pleasant to have the sweetest of earthly sounds, and the one nearest akin to heaven, to bring up, as in a moment, the form, the feature, the expression of the loved one!"

"And such," said Uncle John, "is our memory of the blind child. Not more instantly or more correctly does the sunlight daguerreotype the human face, than does a sweet strain of organ music recall Agnes. Yes, Charles, it is indeed a pleasant memory!"

"Her mother," said Julia, "loves to think of her as enjoying the glorious light of heaven. Her mind dwells upon the thought of the child no longer blind, in a world of unclouded day; but I love best to think of our little musician in a world of harmony

without discord ! I often wonder if in all that happy throng there is one spirit which will drink in more bliss from the harmonies of heaven than will our child-musician."

"If her mother's thoughts of Agnes in heaven," said Uncle John, "are identified with light, her memories of her on earth are certainly associated with music; for Agnes herself scarcely loved that organ more than Grace does now."

"Yes," said Julia, "and she is sure to be there at this hour of the evening, and she never ceases until it is quite dark. Twilight and music are now identified with the thought of Agnes."

"No inappropriate reminder," said Uncle John, "of our little blind musician."

"Surely, Julia," said Charles, "Grace cannot have been at the organ every evening since I have been here ! I certainly could not have been so stupid and apathetic as not to have heard music !"

"No, Charles, she would not touch it for fear of disturbing you."

"So far from that, I have never been so sick that it would not have been soothing and pleasant. I wish that she had not stopped now."

"She will be very willing to resume it, Charles," said Julia, "if it will be agreeable to you."

"Shall I ask her?" said Uncle John.

"Yes, if you please."

Uncle John found Grace, as Julia had said, more than willing to gratify the invalid. Indeed, it had been a self-denial during the past week to keep away from the organ, and the few minutes that she had just spent there, seemed like a hurried glimpse of Agnes, which she was only too glad to prolong. Charles thought that she was playing merely to give him pleasure, but she was indeed talking to her child; and it was the earnestness, the affection that she threw into the music, which gave it so much depth, so much pathos in the ear of her listener.

When she had ceased to play, the bright moonlight was streaming full into the room. Neither spoke for several minutes after the music had died away, for both were reluctant to break the spell. After awhile, Julia said :

"Charles, I have been afraid to talk to you or to ask you any questions; but if you feel strong enough now, I would like for you to tell me how long you have been sick, and all about yourself until you were brought to the Hall."

"That will be impossible, for I remember very little that has happened in the last four or five weeks. I was taken sick about four days after I wrote you that note, when the battle of Malvern

Hill had virtually ended the siege of Richmond. I was exhausted then, for I had been constantly busy during all those battles; but the horrible duties of four successive days and nights after the last one, prostrated me in mind and body. I have little recollection of time, but I do not think that I could have been sick more than two or three days, when the idea seized me that you must not know it; so I sent for Walter, and told him that he and Willie must not mention me at all in their letters, and requested that if I should be very ill I might be sent to the Hall if possible. I wanted to die here. Since then I really remember nothing distinctly until our solemn marriage. Then I was thoroughly awake, and keenly alive to feelings of the most intense pleasure and the severest pain. You can never know the strange commingling of bliss and agony, of hope and fear, with which I looked first upon you, and then upon the death apparently so near and so inevitable. One minute to feel that you were mine, forever mine, and the next to remember that that forever, so far as earthly possession extended, might perhaps be comprised in a few brief hours, or even moments; to grasp with a dying hand the treasure that in life I had so coveted and hoped for and longed for,—oh, Julia, you will never know what I suffered that night! I did not die; but indeed I passed through the worst of death's agonies. But even already I am compensated for it all; even now, while I lie here weak and helpless and dependent upon you for the care and protection which I promised to give you, I thank God for the sickness, the suffering, for anything that has given you to me now, a present possession, instead of that future one which necessarily involved uncertainty. Now no chance or accident can sever us. No human power, no earthly circumstances can take you from me. God alone can separate us now. We belong to each other: you to me and I no less to you. I will guard, protect, and love you; nay, more, I wish that the old Saxon word of the English service, with its strong, deep meaning, had been retained, and I had promised to '*worship*' you. And it shall be your part to influence and encourage me to do what is right. That is both the duty and privilege of a wife; and of all the women that I ever knew, you seem to me most capable of doing it."

"May God give me the ability, Charles, as He has given me the desire to be to you all that you expect or wish. If He will enable us to be to each other what we ought to be, that solemn service the other night will prove indeed far more than an earthly tie, and its influence will extend beyond that grave on whose brink we seemed then to be standing. Ours was indeed a solemn wedding. May its peculiar circumstances help us to realize the solemnity of our union, our promises, our obligations!"

Eva now came back with her letter crushed tightly in her hand. She did not speak; and when Charles called her, she went up in silence to his bedside. The moon shone full upon her face, and he saw traces of tears in her eyes and upon her cheeks.

"You have been crying, child," he said, tenderly; "I hope that Willie did not write you a sad letter?"

"He wrote cheerfully, as he always does," she answered, meekly; "but sometimes my burden gets so heavy that I break down under it. Generally, however, I bear it very well—at least sister thinks so."

"Indeed, I do, Eva," said Julia. "When Charles leaves me, I expect to learn a lesson of patient submission from you. What does Willie say? Anything of a flying visit home?"

"Oh, no! nothing of that kind. He told me when he left, that I must not ask that or even think of it. He said that he had been so many months away from his post, that he could not think of asking a furlough for a long, long time. In our letters we never allude to his coming back, except in some of our bright pictures of peace. Willie and I live in the future now, we never speak of the present at all. All our happiness, all our hopes are garnered up in the future—the blessed future!"

Julia sighed, as she always did now when she heard Eva talk about the future; and as Charles looked upon the young, earnest face before him, and thought of the "many changes and chances of this mortal life," which, like a wide gulf, separated her from that blessed future, as she called it, he too sighed in his heart, although his lips were silent.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CHARLES'S recovery progressed gradually though steadily, and Julia's time was no less completely occupied after he had passed the dangerous stage of his illness than it was when his life trembled in the balance. All her ingenuity and resources were brought into requisition to render less irksome to him the period of convalescence, that neutral-ground between sickness and health, so trying to the patience of the invalid, who can claim neither the indulgence of the one nor the immunities of the other. So suddenly and unexpectedly had the events of the past few weeks been precipitated upon her, and so closely had the most absorb-

ing duties and interests imposed by her new ties followed upon their formation, that Julia scarcely had time to realize that she was indeed a wife. Charles's awakening to a full sense of his happiness had been during the gradual process of recovery, when by degrees he had become accustomed to see Julia about him, performing those gentle offices which are a wife's prerogative; but her complete realization did not come until those ministrations were ended, the object of them restored to health and strength, and his departure for the scene of his labors and duties had left her time and opportunity to think. Then she knew and felt it all. Then she realized that she had indeed taken the final step, that she had entered beyond recall or retreat upon the duties and affections of the highest and holiest earthly state.

Charles was gone, and except that in Grace Mr. Cameron had found another daughter, and the girls another sister, the aspect of the Hall was such as it had been in years gone by, with this only difference, that the two sisters who before had been light-hearted maidens were now anxious wives, and with all their efforts not to let the shadow upon their own individual hearts darken the spirits of others, they could not quite conceal it. None knew the effort that it cost Julia to be serene and cheerful, but none could help seeing with pain and sympathy Eva's constant but unsuccessful attempt to hide her anxiety in her own bosom. The nervous grasp with which she seized the newspapers, and the trembling haste with which she glanced down their columns; the troubled face, the start of alarm at every unusual noise for days after she had read the ominous paragraph, "a battle is imminent and may be expected at any moment;" and withal her effort to be quiet and patient, were very touching: and her father often turned away in sorrow from looking at the child upon whom he felt sure that the burden and anxieties of life had been laid before she was old enough to bear them.

The sisters were together in the library. For several days Eva had been in a state of alarm and dread, for the newspapers on both sides were clamoring for another decisive engagement during the early autumn, on which they had entered, before the rainy season should have put an end to all military movements. Some unaccustomed noise in the yard sent the blood from Eva's cheek, and pressing her hand upon her heart she uttered a stifled scream. Julia was at her side in a moment, and the first touch of a gentle, sisterly hand broke down all her calmness, and the poor child laid her head upon Julia's shoulder and cried as she used to do, but never since she had become a wife. Julia stroked her hair tenderly, and her own tears fell fast upon the young head bowed before her.

It was a long time before Eva could speak, but at last she said, plaintively, as she wiped her eyes:

"I will feel better now. Oh, sister, you don't know how hard I have to try to bear my burden all alone! If I only had somebody to help me!"

"And why not, my poor child," said Julia, compassionately, "why not come to me as you used to do? I am your sister still, Eva, and you have the same claim upon me for sisterly sympathy and support as you had before we were married."

"I cannot have the heart to burden you with my troubles," she answered, "when yours are just as heavy, and besides, sister, your quiet submission makes me ashamed to confess what a tempest is raging in my heart all the time. How long," she exclaimed, piteously, "oh! how much longer must it last?"

Julia's tears flowed now for Eva as they seldom did for her own sorrow. Presently she said, in a tone of gentle reproach:

"Eva, do you know, darling, that I think you are doing very wrong?"

"How, sister?" she asked, quickly. "Oh if you only knew how very hard I am trying to do right!"

"I do know it, child; but you have a mistaken idea of what is right, and are doing yourself and all of us a great wrong. You have imposed upon yourself a restraint for which you are unfitted by nature. You are impulsive, and the feelings of such a temperament must have a vent; otherwise, like smouldering fires within, they will burn out the heart and life. A good hearty cry is a great relief to you now as it always was, and yet instead of thus getting rid of your feelings you are striving all the time to smother them. You have always felt better when you brought your troubles to me, and you have just acknowledged that you longed to go to somebody for help and sympathy, and yet you lock up all your anxieties in your own heart, and do not give me the privilege of sharing them or comforting you, if indeed I am able to do it. Yes, Eva, you have done wrong to me as well as to yourself."

"Oh, sister!" she exclaimed, hastily, "it is not that I thought you were changed, that you were either less able or less willing to comfort and sympathize than you used to be. That is not the reason why I did not come to you. It was only, as I told you just now, because you have your burden too, and instead of adding to yours I am trying to learn from you to bear mine in patience and in silence."

"And think you, Eva, that because you did not confess it in words that therefore I did not know that there was sorrow in your heart? Think you that I have yet to learn to interpret

your restless eye, your haggard cheek, your languid step? Ah, no! I can read you too well for that; and it adds no little to my own individual sorrow to know that the child who has always leaned upon me for support and comfort has at last found a trouble which she cannot or will not bring to her sister. Surely, Eva, you have not yet to be told that there is no burden, however heavy, no trial, however great, that will so absorb me in my selfish feelings as to leave no room in my heart for you!"

"But, sister," she said, simply, "I am trying to be a woman now. Willie told me to do it; and you know submission and fortitude belong to a woman."

"My poor little child-woman!" said Julia, smiling sadly through her tears. "You may try to be a woman, but after all you will still be a child, the same loving, dependent, trusting child that you have always been, and God forbid that you should ever cease to be! Nor did Willie mean that you should, Eva. He did not intend that you should be unnatural. He only meant to encourage you to bear what he knew would be a sore trial to your young heart, a heart which has made its first acquaintance with anxiety and sorrow through its great yearning love for him."

"I have tried too, sister, to keep all my trouble to myself on papa's account. Indeed everybody seems to have now just as much individual sorrow as they can bear. While your husband's life was so uncertain, and I saw you often look, as you went on your patient round, as if one additional pang, one more anxiety would kill you outright, it would have been cruel to have burdened you with what after all were only apprehensions. Grace, in her desolation, has quite enough sorrow of her own, and it would seem the part of humanity to offer her sympathy rather than require it of her; and papa looks so troubled and anxious all the time that I could not go to him. I promised to write cheerfully to Willie, so that I have even been denied the support that I had a right to expect from him. There remained, then, nothing for me to do but to bear it as best I could without human sympathy or aid. And yet, sister," she added, reverently, "I have not been altogether friendless or comfortless. I have often found peace when I have gone in a tumult of anxiety, and comfort when I have been in an agony of distress."

"There indeed, Eva, you need never be afraid to go. That Sympathy is inexhaustible, and therefore cannot be too heavily taxed; that Compassion is infinite, and therefore capable of satisfying the largest demands. But for all that, you need not and ought not to deny yourself that human sympathy which God Himself has not thought insignificant, even though His own sustain-

ing power and comfort are sufficient. And if my individual cares and duties were a barrier in your way before, they need be so no longer. Charles is gone, and I am no longer occupied with him, and since our relations and ties are the same, so must be our apprehensions and anxieties, and therefore I will be able to enter into all your feelings. So hereafter, child, you will come to your sister as of old, won't you?"

"Yes, and thank you for the privilege. But how is it that you are able not only to bear your own trouble, but to help me too? Indeed I cannot understand it. Oh, sister, how I wish that I were only like you! Then Willie would have a wife indeed!"

"Willie would be sorely grieved at the change," replied Julia, smiling, "and I not less so. No, Eva, it is better as it is. Our temperaments are different by nature, and different circumstances have moulded our characters. The motherless child early learned to bear her little troubles silently and without complaint, while you, more fortunate, always had a sister's ear and a sister's heart, scarcely less willing than a mother's, to listen and to comfort. So let it be still, and until you have your husband with you again, be contented to lean as heretofore upon your sister."

From that day Julia felt that still another duty devolved upon her, and that she must sustain Eva as well as herself, and the clinging dependent heart of the young wife found a precious stay and support in her sister's love.

The autumn passed away without another dreaded conflict. Eva, who loved the month of October, with its deep-blue skies, its pure, bracing air, and its glorious sunshine, now for the first time in her life longed for its departure, and welcomed with heartfelt satisfaction the bleak winds and murky skies of November, sure harbingers of that rainy season that would put an end to military movements. And when still later Willie wrote that the army had actually gone into winter quarters, with a joyous outburst like her former self she read the joyful news, and from that moment a mighty weight seemed lifted from her heart. Gradually the light returned to her eye, the elasticity to her step, and the sunshine to her spirit. She never dreamed that Willie could be sick. All that she dreaded for him was the cannon ball, the bullet, or the shell; and now that he was for some months at least safe from these, her heart rebounded from its long depression, and her father and Julia saw with unmingled pleasure that she was becoming almost the Eva of old, the light and life of the Hall. All through the winter the letters came regularly, and they were always messengers of cheerfulness and hope. They contained no evil tidings, no lamentations, no complaints; and at last even Julia, who, unlike Eva, feared disease

more than the cannon ball, began to rest quietly and securely in the assurance of Charles's enjoyment of perfect health.

Eva and Carlo had never ceased to be friends, but it was long since they had been companions. For a long while Carlo used often to come up to her and look wistfully in her face, as if to implore one of those frolics which had once been a mutual pleasure, but his silent pleadings were unheeded and himself unnoticed, except with a passing caress, which had in it as much of sadness as of affection. Now, however, as her spirits revived, so did her love of those out-door pleasures which he used to share, and the exercise in the open air served to bring back the roses to her cheek and vigor to her frame. Winter though it was, every day when the sun was bright she and Carlo rambled through the leafless grove and along the winding brook, and she always spent a few minutes upon the rock under the old walnut-tree where her destiny had been sealed.

Never before had her young sister been so dear to Julia's heart as she was this winter, and ever afterward she thanked God for its precious memories of peace and love. If Eva had herself shrunk from the duties and responsibilities of womanhood, Julia had no less deprecated them for her. While she knew that her sister could not always remain a child, and that she must at some future day "put away childish things," Julia, like Eva, wanted to postpone it as long as possible. Eva's joyous disposition was peculiarly suited to childhood, and while it seemed that she, better than another, could have worn its graces far into maturity, it was a source of mingled surprise and regret to Julia that circumstances had laid upon her the burden of womanhood while she was still a child in years as well as in feeling.

Julia had been afraid that in becoming a woman Eva would altogether cease to be a child, and in the first few months after her marriage these fears had been painfully realized. She seemed indeed to have lost forever the sunshine of childhood, and anxiety and suspense had clouded her heart and weighed down her spirits. Now, however, she had regained all that is bright and attractive in childhood without losing the strength of character that she had acquired in the process of womanly development. Her character was now a beautiful commingling of the child and the woman, with the gentleness, the dependence, the loving trust of the one, and the patience and fortitude of the other. Eva had once been the light of Julia's heart, now she was its comfort and treasure; and to watch day by day the gradual unfolding of those inward principles, whose development is revealed in the outward tempers and actions, was to Julia an unfailing source of pleasure.

In this world of uncertainty and change, Julia had never permitted herself to arrange plans for the future, upon whose fulfillment her happiness must depend, and especially did she endeavor to guard against it at a time when the strongest foundations on which to build hopes and plans were as unstable as the shifting sand or the treacherous wave. But now she found, to her surprise, that involuntarily and almost unconsciously she had come to a quiet determination never to be separated from Eva. She knew that Charles's and Willie's homes were widely severed, and she did not at all see clearly how she could accomplish what she wished and designed; but in this instance, Julia, more like Eva than like herself, resolutely shut her eyes to all difficulties, obstacles, and impossibilities, and determined that she never would consent to be separated from that sister in whom her heart was becoming every day more completely bound up.

Nor was Julia less necessary to Eva, who now became suddenly aware that there was no longer any barrier of age between herself and her sister, whom she had been accustomed to regard rather with that reverential love due to a mother than with the equalizing and familiar affection of a sister. Eva had always looked upon herself as a child and her sister as a woman, and had imagined that the same gulf would always separate them. Now, however, she most unexpectedly found herself upon a perfect equality with her,—her companion, in the full sense of the word, and not such a one as the child is to the mother. And from the stand-point of womanhood which she had just reached, she could now, more fully than ever, appreciate Julia's character. She found that what before she had looked upon as a sort of unapproachable goodness with which Julia had in some way been remarkably endowed, but which was unattainable by most of her sex, was indeed nothing but the rich flowering of a deeply-rooted Christian principle, nothing but the development of the best traits of that common womanhood which was alike open to all, and which any others might attain if they would seek them as earnestly and conscientiously as she did.

And so the sisters grew daily more dependent upon each other, and if Julia's enjoyment of her sister's companionship was sometimes marred by the lingering dread that, in spite of her determination to the contrary, circumstances might hereafter compel their separation, no such fears disturbed Eva, but in her bright dreams of "the blessed future," her sister and her sister's husband combined with Willie to make her happiness complete.

In Grace, Julia and Eva had found a sister indeed. She was not more kind and affectionate than she had been for many years, but all that restraint, that shrinking from them which Eva had

not noticed, but which had so much annoyed Julia, was now gone. Identified with them, and feeling for the first time as if she had a right to that kindness which heretofore she had received as a stranger, Grace was now thoroughly and truly the daughter and sister, and while Julia rejoiced, for her sake, that she had found in her desolating bereavement the shelter and sympathy of home, she was also thankful for her own, that in her gentle, patient sister-in-law, she could always have access to a friend and counselor in whom she could trust.

From the beginning, Mr. Cameron had placed Grace upon a footing with his other daughters, and with a delicacy which had avoided so much attention on the one hand as to make her feel that she was not one of them, and so little on the other as to indicate that she did not occupy the same place in his affections as they did, he had continued to make her feel perfectly at home and to establish between her and himself the same unreserved intercourse which he had always allowed his children.

Mr. Cameron was not, and never could again be what he had been. The sting planted in his heart by a recreant son could not but rankle and fester as long as he lived, and there was always a shadow upon his spirits. Like his elder daughter, he tried to keep all his troubles to himself, and thinking that there was enough of sadness at the Hall without his adding to it, he assumed for the sake of others a cheerfulness which he did not feel. But Julia could not be deceived. She watched him more narrowly and understood him more thoroughly than the others, and the cloud which, for their sakes, he tried to hide, and which was invisible to them, was very evident to her. She devoted herself more closely to her father than ever, and the tender sympathy which she dared not express in words overflowed in a thousand little delicate attentions which a daughter can bestow, and a father can appreciate.

Uncle John was always bright. His old age seemed to reverse the usual picture of human life, and the nearer his sun approached the horizon, the fuller and brighter and clearer it shone. Such a genial, pleasant old age is as beautiful as it is rare. He never forgot that he had been young, and therefore he could enter into the feelings of the young and be their companion. He never forgot that he was old and had but a brief time left wherein to do life's duty, and therefore he was constantly on the alert to seize every opportunity for doing good or conferring happiness. The smile always upon his face was but the reflection of the contented spirit within, and his beaming countenance and cheerful voice, and his singular talent for finding and exposing to view the bright side of every circumstance and event, made

him always a welcome visitor and an invaluable friend. Besides all this, Uncle John had a peculiar way of his own in expressing sympathy. It was not in the formality of words or in any ostensible act. It was a certain nameless something in the expression of his eye, the grasp of his hand, the tones of his voice, that spoke right to the heart, and needed no words to interpret. He did not wait to know the trouble or to be told what the burden was. Where he was interested, his eye was quick to detect it if there was anything wrong, and just as quick to say, by its unmistakable glance, that he would like to comfort if he could. He was at the Hall almost every day, and it must indeed have been some unusual press of business which could compel him to deny himself for several successive days this, the only social pleasure of his lonely life. He came at all hours, and was always alike welcome. Sometimes he came to breakfast, sometimes to spend the night, and not unfrequently would ride up to the house, and calling the girls out upon the porch, would talk to them a few minutes, and then go away without dismounting.

So the winter passed away, calm and quiet, in spite of all disturbing causes. There was, it is true, much reason for anxiety and disquietude; but then, too, there was much cause for thankfulness, and there were many comforts which, fortunately for the peace of all, were gratefully received and appreciated. There were no murmurings or repinings at privations, no useless longings for the luxuries of other days, no complaints because the ease and indulgence of their former life had now to be exchanged for care and labor. They all patiently accepted these things, and each one, by trying to bear with fortitude individual troubles, sustained and comforted the rest.

But there was more than mere calmness, mere tranquillity at Cameron Hall; there was peace, sweet peace in some of the hearts there. There is a peace which, while it cannot make us indifferent to sorrow and anxiety, can nevertheless enable us to rise above them; a peace, which strikes so deep into the soul, that storm and tempest cannot uproot it; a peace, like the golden sunlight behind the cloud, which, while it cannot altogether pierce its darkness, may at least gild its edges. Such a peace can only result from the uprightness of an honest Christian heart which tries "to think and do always such things as are right," and, conscious of its own integrity of purpose, can, like the obedient and loving child, trustingly commit its all to the protection and guidance of that Father who "doeth all things well."

Again the spring returned, the soft, beautiful spring, with its life-giving sunshine and gentle showers to recall from the grave of winter the resurrected life of inanimate nature, and, alas! to

send too to the grave from which there is no yearly resurrection, thousands of stalwart forms and brave and generous hearts. As soon as the winter was gone, all was again astir in the camp and in the army, and active preparations were made on both sides for the prosecution of a vigorous campaign. All was astir, too, in the thousands of throbbing hearts in our Southern homes, not the eager bustle, the animating excitement, the restless activity of preparation, but the unnoticed and unknown pang of the aching heart which sits in quiet waiting, and in sickening suspense, with none but God to witness and to know what it suffers. Ah! there is a heroism which no blood-stained battle-field reveals to the gaze of an astonished world, which no pen engraves upon the historic page for the admiration of future generations! Amid the smoke of battle, the clash of arms and the thunders of artillery, the hero and the patriot win for themselves a shrine in the hearts of a grateful nation; but the recording angel finds nothing worthier of a place on his tablet than the uncomplaining submission of some patient wife or mother, who has given her all to her country, who would not recall the gift, and who sits in the quiet of her own home for weeks and months and years, with torturing fear, and agonizing dread, and racking suspense for her companions!

With returning spring, all Eva's anxieties returned. She tried hard to keep them down, she prayed and longed to attain that implicit trust which casteth out *fear*. Ah, Eva! religion cannot, nor would it if it could, render you less human, less a woman! It is not designed to exterminate our fears, but only to teach us where to carry them; not to crush out our cares, but lovingly to invite us to cast them all upon *Him*, "for he careth for us."

It did not require many weeks of her renewed anxieties to fade the roses which the respite of the winter had brought out upon her cheeks. Again her step gradually lost its buoyancy, and her figure its contour of health and vigor. Care and sorrow, while they purified her spirit, did their work upon her bodily frame, and the hopeless struggle of her life wasted her energies and consumed her strength. There was no visible disease; nothing that medical skill or remedies could reach. The effect was upon the body, but the cause was deep seated in the mind, far beyond the reach of the healing art of man. Willie did not know it. Her letters were to him the same cheerful messengers that they had ever been, and while there was in them less of the future than there used to be, he did not regret it, since it only left the more room and the more time for her to pour out the full, deep tide, fuller and deeper than it had ever been, of her love for him. His letters were still full of the future, of home, and peace; but

while heretofore her heart had responded to his in hope and glad expectation, now she always folded his letters with a quiet sigh, for she felt assured that the only home of peace that they would ever enjoy together would be in that world where "there shall be no more war." She often wondered if she ought not to write to Willie and tell him so, and sometimes feared that she was treating him cruelly thus to permit him to live upon hopes which could never be realized; but then she remembered that he could not be spared now; that nothing, however urgent, could obtain for him at this time leave of absence even for a few days. She recollected that he had charged her never to forget that she was a soldier's wife, and begged her to accept with fortitude its privations and trials. Above all, she remembered her promise to encourage him to be faithful to his duty, instead of tempting him to neglect or abandon it. This last thought never failed to convince her what her duty was, and she always dismissed the subject with the determination:

"Willie cannot come to me, and he shall not know that I need him."

The only exercise that she was now capable of taking was a short walk upon the lawn, before the sun grew hot. This time she always spent lingering among the flowers, the same roses that she used to gather every day for Willie's sick-room, and she always returned to the house with a handful of them which she placed in a vase upon the little table beside Willie's sofa, on which she now spent most of the day.

Julia watched her gradual decay with a painful certainty of the result, but not so her father and Uncle John. Man's heart is slow to see and to acknowledge an impending blow. It repels the idea of an inevitable calamity, and strong in its own power to control and to protect, it clasps tightly the object of its love, and refuses to believe that what is so essential to its comfort and happiness must be surrendered. So it was now with Mr. Cameron. He could not or would not see what was so evident to others. He felt the profoundest sympathy and pity for the child who could not bear up, like her sister, under the burden of life, but he did not dream that her vital energies were wasting away under its weight. He endeavored constantly to divert her mind by pleasing pictures of what they would do, and how happy they would be, when Willie should come home on a visit, and tried to incite her, for his sake, to efforts at exercise which she felt herself incapable of making. She saw that her father was deceived, and she was glad that it was so.

"He cannot detain me," she thought, "and with him as with Willie, 'ignorance is bliss.'"

CHAPTER XXX.

It was the evening after the battle of Sharpsburg, and Charles Beaufort was standing, knife in hand, at the door of the hospital. He had been laboring almost without cessation for more than twenty-four hours, and heart and body were alike exhausted with the sickening toil. With the assistance of another surgeon he had just completed a most painful and delicate operation, and was now leaning wearily against the door, looking out upon the peaceful evening scene, such a refreshing contrast to the objects of pain and suffering with which he had been so long engaged. But Charles did not see its beauty. His thoughts had wandered to the neighboring battle-field, and he was wondering, with a feeling of sickening dread, what had become of Willie, of whom no tidings had been heard since the close of the battle. Walter and one of Willie's comrades had gone out that morning to search for him, and had not yet returned. The day was nearly gone, and Charles, whose doubts and fears had now almost settled down into gloomy certainty, was straining his eyes to see if he could not descry in the distance the returning messengers. Suddenly a voice from within summoned him again to his distressing work.

"Come, Beaufort, we want you here. This poor fellow has just been brought in, and must be attended to at once."

He turned and went in, and a groan of agony escaped him as in the mangled form before him, covered with dust and gore, he recognized the active, stalwart figure, all sinew and muscle, which Willie had borne into the battle on the preceding day.

"Not on this case! not on this case!" Charles murmured, as he sank upon a seat and covered his face with his hands. "Get somebody else to help you, and for God's sake be quick!"

"He is beyond the reach of human skill," said one of the surgeons gently, as he went up to Willie, and looked with compassion, first upon him and then upon his fellow-surgeon, who seemed scarcely to suffer less. "We need not torture him."

Another groan burst from Charles, and the words, "Poor Eva!" struggled involuntarily from his lips.

At the sound of that name the closed eyes opened, and gazed with a dreamy look all around. Everything was strange; the room, the faces, the victims of torture around. There was nothing familiar, nothing pleasant; and with a sigh of disappointment, he wearily closed his eyes again, and murmured:

"It was only a dream. I thought somebody called Eva. Give me water."

Charles sprang up, and going to Willie, he moistened his parched lips, and poured some water into his mouth. Then he said :

"Look at me, Willie! Julia's husband, Eva's brother!"

With a smile of pleasure he tried to take Charles's hand, and something fell from his relaxed grasp and rolled upon the floor. The other hand still held something else as with a miser's clutch. Charles took up from the floor the little gold locket containing Eva's picture, tied by the long ribbon with which she had secured it around his neck. Now, soiled with dust and wet with his own heart's blood, he had grasped it still, and the last effort of his expiring strength was to fix one more loving look upon that young face.

"Let me see it again," he said.

Charles held it up before him. The fast-glazing eyes strained to take it in, and the last of earth on which they lingered was that bright, joyous face, beaming with love and unclouded by sorrow.

"I cannot see it any longer," he murmured. "It is all dark now."

Charles closed the locket, and stood waiting, with an aching heart, to see the end so close at hand.

"Where are you, Charles?" he asked.

"He clasped the cold hand, and received Willie's dying message to Eva.

"Tell Eva that I have done my duty. Tell her that my life, thus cut off in its prime, is not thrown away; if I had another I would offer that to my country too. Tell her that I wore her picture upon my heart while I lived, and that it shall still lie there when that heart is cold and still in the grave. Tell her that I loved her to the end; that the last thing I looked upon was her face; but above all, tell her that I have tried to fulfill my baptismal vow; I have tried to be 'Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto my life's end;' I have served my country, I have tried to serve my God, I am not afraid to die. God bless my young wife, my precious Eva! God grant us to meet in that world of peace where there shall be no more war! God bless, God protect, God comfort my Eva, for Christ's sake!"

The prayer ceased. The life had ebbed away with the blood of that brave, young heart, and soldier eyes were not ashamed of the soldier tears that fell upon that crushed and lifeless form.

Charles took one more long, lingering look at the bright, happy face which would nevermore be bright and happy, and murmuring

"Poor Eva!" he reverently laid the young wife's picture upon the husband's heart, before it had yet grown cold in death. He then unclasped the clinched hand, and found what had once been a long, rich curl, now a tangled mass, clotted with gore.

In the quiet of midnight, and in the subdued and feeble twilight of the starlit skies, a waiting group stood around an open grave. The stars seemed to look shrinkingly upon the field of blood and carnage beneath them, and it was a pale and sickly light that they shed upon it, as if ashamed to reveal its gory horrors. Strangely, unnaturally quiet was the night. The thunders of artillery, the rattle of musketry, the shout and yell of battle, were all hushed now. Even Death himself seemed satisfied with his harvest, and not unwillingly allowed a brief respite to his messengers of destruction. Surrounded on every side by death in all its unmitigated horrors, with its stillness, its coldness, its helplessness, the words of the solemn burial service, "in the midst of life we are in death," sounded like a warning voice from the thousands of dead who strewed the red field, in whose veins the life-blood had, the day before, coursed as rapidly, and whose hearts had throbbed as hopefully as if they were never to die. Now the blood had ceased to flow, the heart was still, and there, in that vast graveyard of unburied dead, one was now laid away to rest, with the sad words of commitment: "Earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust."

It was done. The young soldier slept a profound, dreamless sleep, which would nevermore be disturbed by the din of battle and the clash of arms. His brother-soldiers lingered a moment after their work was done, looked sadly upon that fresh mound, and then turned and went away to the active duties and bustling scenes of their daily life. Only one remained; and as Charles Beaufort stood with folded arms at the head of that newly-made grave, his heart was far away, and his thoughts were painfully busy in picturing the agony of that sweet, childlike heart, on which the blight of widowhood had so early fallen.

That same night, at Cameron Hall, Eva tossed, feverish and restless, upon her sleepless bed. It was not that her anxieties had been sharpened, or that her fears were greater than usual; it was not that she dreaded for Willie any special calamity: it was only one of those unaccountable heart-longings which sometimes seize us when separated by death or absence from those we love; when reason's voice is unheeded; when impossibilities are ignored; when even obligations of Christian submission and patience are, for the moment, forgotten, and the heart, like the mother of old, refuses to be comforted, and in its desolation and loneliness cries out for the object of its desire. So it was that

night with Eva. All that she knew or felt was that she wanted Willie, that her heart needed him, and that she must have him. She did not rebel, she did not even murmur, but she could not subdue the painful longing, and she lay there in the silence and darkness of midnight, where all else was peaceful except her heart, all else was still except its restless beating. Sad and lonely, and unable to compose herself to sleep, she at last thought of awakening her sister, who slept on a couch beside her bed. For awhile she refused to yield to the selfish desire. Her sister had lain awake a long time with her, and had only given herself up to repose when she thought that Eva had fallen asleep. Now she was resting sweetly and quietly, and Eva knew that, like herself, Julia's only respite from corroding and wearing anxiety was in the blessed unconsciousness of sleep. For awhile she tossed and groaned, struggling against the temptation that was becoming every moment more irresistible; but at last, with a mingled feeling of helplessness and self-reproach, she called her sister. Julia sprang up in an instant, and hastily asked what was the matter.

"Nothing really, sister," answered Eva, in a penitent tone. "I am ashamed to disturb you, and still more ashamed to acknowledge that I have done it for no better reason than because I cannot sleep and want company."

"Never mind disturbing me," answered Julia, kindly. "That is nothing in comparison with my relief to find that you are not sick."

"No, sister, not sick," she answered, plaintively, "but lonely, inexpressibly lonely; sick at heart if not in body. Never in all my life before have I felt such a longing to see Willie. It is always the paramount wish of my heart, but to-night it is the absorbing one. Always before, the thought of home and of the love of you and papa has mingled with a subduing influence in the sorrow of my separation from him. But to-night all this seems as nothing. I cannot even find any comfort in the thought of these blessings, great as they are. Oh, sister! I don't want to be ungrateful for the tenderness of the best of fathers, the best of sisters, but I want Willie. Nobody else can satisfy me now!"

Julia listened in silent sorrow. She had no encouraging hopes to offer Eva, for she knew how impossible it was for him to come now, and she felt assured that unless he did come soon, he would never see his wife again.

Eva talked all night, and her burden was her longing to see Willie. At last, with a weary sigh, she said:

"Oh, for the sweet forgetfulness of sleep! I am so tired, and my head is so confused. It is not pain, but it is a feeling worse than pain."

It was nearly daylight when she fell into an uneasy slumber, which at length settled down into profound sleep.

The morning was far advanced, and the sun was bright and hot, when Uncle John came in, his face glowing with heat, and as he gave Julia two letters, he said :

"I could not wait until the evening to bring them, for I knew that you children were so anxious, and that they would be so welcome."

Julia flew up stairs and looked into Eva's room. She was awake, and asked, languidly :

"What time is it, sister?"

"It is almost twelve o'clock. See here! I have brought you a pleasure next to that of seeing Willie."

With a faint cry of joy, Eva seized the letter, and tearing open the envelope, sat up in bed to read it. It was written hopefully and cheerfully as usual on the eve of their departure, to what destination he did not know, but he felt sure that it was to active service. The telegraph had since revealed the object to be the invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania. The sisters were quietly reading their letters, when a sudden scream startled not only Eva, but Julia, too; and Lucy rushed into the room, wringing her hands, and exclaiming, in wild affright :

"Oh, Lord! Miss Julia! Master Willie's killed! He was killed the other day in a big battle!"

With a piercing shriek of agony that absolutely stilled Julia's heart, Eva sank back upon the bed in wild delirium. The sudden shock had been too much for her shattered nerves, and scream followed scream, until they all wondered how her exhausted frame could bear such intense excitement. She was perfectly ungovernable, and when, at last, she became quiet from sheer exhaustion, there was a wild, unnatural gleam of her eye, so different from its usual soft expression, that Julia feared that her reason was hopelessly gone. Her whole face was distorted, and she tore out her hair by handfuls and strewed the floor with her long, beautiful curls. She heeded not father or sister or Uncle John. Indeed, she did not seem to recognize any of them. Grace alone could soothe and quiet her; and Julia went off to her own room to pray earnestly for the privilege of laying in the grave that sister from whom but a few short months ago she had resolved, in her own short-sighted ignorance, that nothing should ever separate her.

Medical treatment was of no avail. Her head was shaved and blistered, but it did not abate her violence. She was perfectly uncontrollable for days, and then, as if from mere physical prostration, the paroxysms became less violent and less frequent. So

it went on for weeks, and from intense excitement there was a slow and gradual sinking both of mind and body into hopeless apathy. She never mentioned Willie or made the slightest allusion to him, and, indeed, she rarely spoke at all, except to make known her physical wants. Grace and Julia never left her. The only emotion which she ever showed was a dread of being left alone; and now, since the violence was all gone and she had become perfectly quiet, her old, clinging love for her sister had returned, and she was not willing for her to leave her side for a single moment. Julia, with the patience of a mother with her little child, devoted herself entirely to Eva, and tried hard to recall her wandering intellect. She was always devising and planning something pleasant to engage her attention, and she hoped and longed for her to mention Willie. This, Julia regarded as the lost balance-wheel of her mind, and she clung to the belief that if Eva could only be thoroughly aroused to a sense of her bereavement, that all would be right again. She was afraid to mention him herself, but by talking of the past, and by leading Eva's thoughts into those channels which would most naturally suggest Willie, she tried to awaken her memory and to make her speak the name which she herself dared not utter. But day after day and week after week Julia had hoped and waited in vain. Neither word nor look betrayed that Willie was not the same indifferent stranger that he was when Uncle John had brought him to the Hall. Not even the flowers which, more than anything else were associated with him, could now recall him; and Eva watched her sister as she often arranged them in the same vase and on the same table that used always to stand beside his sofa, with the same quiet indifference that she saw her do everything else.

One morning Julia came into the library with a handful of magnificent roses sparkling with dew-drops. She called Eva's attention to their uncommon beauty, and received in reply the casual glance and the indifferent response to which she was now quite accustomed. While she was arranging them in the vase, Julia took up a splendid white rose, half blown, and laden with dew. She held it up and was looking at it in silent admiration, when all at once Eva said, extending her hand:

"Give it to me, sister; it reminds me of Willie. He loves flowers."

With a thrill of pleasure and of awakened hope, Julia looked earnestly into her sister's face as she gave her the flower. The wildness was all gone from the eye, and in its stead was an expression of patient suffering, but there was still a dreamy, wandering, inquiring look, as if the mind were vainly searching for a

lost link, a key to some painful mystery. But this was all. The tangled skein baffled the feeble efforts of the impaired reason, and while now Willie all at once resumed his long-lost place in her thoughts, and she talked of him all the time, it was with a strange admixture of consciousness and ignorance. It was a painful yet a sweet hallucination which mingled, as only an unsettled reason can, the sense of bereavement with an utter ignorance of its cause. She seemed to know and yet not to know that she was a widow. Every morning she dressed herself in her widow's weeds and gathered up beneath the folds of her widow's cap the soft, silvery hair, with which the fearful shock had replaced her brown, clustering curls; but every evening the cap was removed, the white hair was curled, a wreath of flowers, such as she wore at her wedding, encircled her brow, and, robed in her white muslin dress, she sat for hours on the porch watching with patient expectation for Willie's return. And when twilight had deepened into night she would go into the house again, with a look of sad but uncomplaining disappointment, and would say: "Willie is not coming to-night, sister, but he will be here to-morrow?" Then the bridal wreath and the white dress were laid aside to be worn again on the morrow. Day after day she followed the same routine. Continued disappointment did not wear out her hope; no word of surprise or impatience that Willie did not come ever escaped her lips, but quietly and patiently she watched for him every evening, to be every evening as surely disappointed. There was something inexpressibly touching in her appearance as she thus waited for him. Her complexion, always fair, was now almost dazzling in its whiteness, and unrelieved by the slightest tinge of color. There was something singular but by no means unpleasing in the effect of those curls of soft, silvery hair, that fell around her sad, young face, and seemed to mingle in one touching picture the griefs and troubles of old age with the freshness of early youth. And while she still expected Willie's return, with strange inconsistency she was neither surprised nor disappointed that she did not hear from him. For a long time, Julia carefully concealed Charles's letters, neither reading them in her presence nor making any allusion to them for fear that it would awaken anxiety and wonder that she too no longer received the letters to which she had so long been accustomed. Her caution, however, was wholly unnecessary. One day Eva came suddenly upon her sister while she was reading a letter from Charles. Julia tried to hide it, but Eva recognized it at once, and only asked if Charles was well and if he mentioned Walter. She seemed to know that he could tell her nothing of Willie.

The care and attention of the family were now concentrated upon Eva. She was the constant thought of the household by day and by night, and, while as they looked upon the sad wreck of a joyous life, a loving nature, and a young heart, they could not wish to detain her here in her sorrow, they still clung to the patient sufferer with a yearning, tender love, stronger even than they had felt for her in her days of happiness. Julia seemed only to live for her. To wait upon her and talk to her, to plan for her comfort, to interest and amuse her were her employment and her sad pleasure.

After a time Eva's strength began again to fail, and Willie's sofa was generally her place all day until the evening, when she always dressed herself to meet him. Heretofore she had gathered her own flowers from Willie's favorite rose bushes, twined her own wreath and dressed herself, but now she was not strong enough for such an exertion, and it became Julia's daily duty. Never before was there so painful and trying a task as now devolved upon poor Julia. To sit with tearless eyes and listen to Eva's expectations that he would certainly come this time; to hear unmoved her admiration of the wreath that she was making, and her assurances that it would meet with Willie's approval; to hear her childlike expressions of that love which, in her young heart, was emphatically stronger than death,—required a degree of self-control far beyond anything that she had ever attempted before, and to which even her habits of discipline scarcely enabled her to attain. Often in spite of all her efforts her hands trembled so that the flower dropped from them, and sometimes she had to turn hastily away to prevent the unbidden tear from falling upon the wreath.

Not unfrequently, when Eva was dressed ready to meet Willie, she would say:

"He will certainly come this evening; don't you think so, sister?" And Julia, believing that in such a case the slight equivocation could not be wrong, would reply:

"I trust so, my darling."

Then Eva would pass out to her pleasant dream of hope and happiness that was never to be realized; and Julia, sinking into a chair, would seek relief in those tears which for her sister's sake she had before restrained.

The only thing that ever awakened the light in Eva's eye or a beam of pleasure upon her face was the organ-music. She specially loved it at the hour when she was waiting for Willie, because, as she said, she wanted him to hear his glad welcome home long before words and smiles could reach him. Grace gratified her, and so day after day the young wife and the music

prepared together their welcome for him who was never to receive it.

It was now late in October. The chill evening air could not drive Eva from her seat on the open porch, and neither argument nor entreaty could prevail upon her to exchange her muslin dress for one of warmer texture or even to throw around her a protecting shawl.

"No," she said, "Willie likes this dress best, and he must see me first in this."

One evening Julia had been much longer than usual gathering the flowers for Eva's wreath. They were now almost gone and she had considerable difficulty in finding enough. As soon as she entered the room, Eva exclaimed, glancing at the clock:

"Come, sister, make haste! We are later than usual. I ought to have begun to dress half an hour ago."

"It is quite time enough, Eva," said Julia, wishing to put it off as long as possible, for every day she grew more and more anxious about her sister's long exposure to the cold evening air.

"No, sister, we are too late," she answered, nervously. "Willie is certainly coming now, and I would not for the world have him come and not find me waiting. Please, sister, let us make haste."

Thus urged, Julia could not delay. Eva watched the growing wreath with more than her usual interest, and frequently stopped to admire the flowers as she handed them to her sister.

"What a beautiful bud this is!" she exclaimed. "I know that Willie will admire this particularly. He loves flowers," she added, dreamily, "and told me, when he went away so long ago, that if there should be a flower in the pit or in the garden when he came home I must wear it to meet him. I am going to meet him now, and I must wear the flowers as he told me. He used to say that I always ought to wear them,—that flowers and Eva seemed to belong to each other."

And so she talked on, partly to her sister but more to herself, while Julia placed the wreath upon the fair young brow on which the white hair was smoothly parted to fall on each side in its silvery curls.

"Certainly coming! Certainly coming now!" were the last words that Julia heard as Eva went out to her evening watch.

At first the bright rays of the setting sun rested like a halo upon her head, and then, as the shadows lengthened and she still sat there in her quiet, patient expectancy, with her white face, her white dress, and her white hair, she looked in the deepening twilight as if she might have been a white-robed messenger from the spirit-land.

When she went back into the house her face did not wear its usual expression of sad disappointment. It was bright with hope and confidence; but her step was languid, and throwing herself upon the bed, she said, wearily:

"I am tired, sister, very tired."

Yes, she was tired: tired of watching, tired of waiting, tired of longing, tired of hoping! In a few minutes she was fast asleep in her bridal dress and her bridal wreath, and the young wife, unconscious of her widowhood, was dreaming sweetly of meeting Willie.

The next morning the sounds of awakened life, the bright sunshine, and the singing of the birds could not disturb Eva. She slept sweetly, calmly. Her face was very white and very still, but it wore a sweet glad smile, the smile with which she at last met Willie! He did not come to her, but she had gone to him!

CHAPTER XXXI.

EVA had been dead but a few weeks when rumors again reached Hopedale of the proposed occupation of the town by the Federal army during the approaching winter. Julia was now sorely tried. To be shut up within the enemy's lines and cut off from all communication with her husband was an intolerable thought, and to leave her father alone in his sorrowful old age was quite as impossible. Mr. Cameron was now rapidly growing old, for trouble silvers the hair, paralyzes the energies, wrinkles the brow, and wastes the strength faster than old age or disease. Julia pondered her duty long and earnestly. She knew full well to what wearing anxiety she would subject herself if she decided to stay at home, and she knew too that it would condemn her husband to the same burden; but when she looked upon her gray-headed stricken father, there was something that appealed irresistibly to a daughter's feelings, and deep down in her heart she heard a low but distinct whisper: "*Honor thy father.*"

And now came a letter from Charles, bidding her escape with eager haste, and begging her not to linger until retreat should be impossible. In her answer there was no hesitation. She pictured the old man's loneliness and sorrow, and told her husband that she could not consent to leave her father. It was a painful letter both to herself and to Charles. She closed it with a pang, as she thought that perhaps with her own hand she had

sealed their final separation on earth ; and he, after he had read it, refolded it with a sigh, and murmured : " It is hard, but she is right."

She did not tell her father what she had done ; and a few mornings after she had dispatched this letter, Mr. Cameron summoned her and Grace to the library. He looked sadder and more troubled than ever, and Julia wondered what new cause of sorrow he had found. Without a single word of preface or explanation, he only said :

" My daughters, you must both leave me !"

Grace looked up in speechless surprise, and Julia, without a moment's reflection and with an impulsiveness that painfully recalled Eva, replied, hastily :

" Never, papa, never !"

Her father looked at her with a moistened eye, and said :

" You will go, my daughter, if your father thinks it necessary, if he particularly requests it,—will you not ?"

" Yes, papa, if you bid me go I must obey, but I will not voluntarily leave you. You cannot do without me now. Charles and I have already settled that matter, and I am to stay with you."

" God bless my children for their unselfishness !" he answered ; " but I will not require the sacrifice of them. I will not separate you. You are young and I am old. You need each other ; I can get along alone the brief remnant of my life."

" But, father," interposed Grace, " why send me away ? Julia's ties and duties may call her elsewhere, but mine are here. A wanderer for so many long years, I have just found a home and a father, and my worn-out heart longs for rest. Don't send me away among strangers ; let me stay with you."

" God only knows, Grace, how I wish that it could be so. Without my children I will be lonely and desolate indeed, and yet it is for my own comfort as well as for your sake that I now send you away. We live in the country, and we cannot tell to what annoyances and insults you may be exposed. You remember to what the girls were subjected before ; and when I came home and found them in the power of that Yankee ruffian, I resolved that they should never again be exposed to anything like that. I would rather be separated from you for years, yes forever, than to see you in the power of their lawless and brutal soldiers. Now, to such insults as they received before, and perhaps worse, you would be liable all the time. I should be miserable in view of it by day and by night, and it is to rid myself of this intolerable burden as well as to insure your safety that I ask you to go away."

"But, papa," said Julia, earnestly, "do you go with us. Let us all go together, and then there will be no cause of anxiety left behind. There are so few of us left now," she added, as her eyes filled, "and so many dangers to be encountered, that we ought to stay together."

"This is my home, daughter," he answered, "the only home that I have ever had. I was born here, I have lived here, and here at the old Hall I want to die. Young people can bear transplanting, but when the fibers of the old heart have struck deeply and become firmly rooted, it will not do to tear them up. No, I cannot leave my home. And besides, Julia, what would then become of the old Hall? If we abandon it, the enemy will desolate and ruin it. Think of your home, your mother's, Eva's home a desolation, a ruin! You could not bear that."

"It would be very hard to bear," she answered, sorrowfully, "but you cannot prevent it by staying. If they choose they will lay it waste, and if they should, it would be better for you to be where you could not see it. We were all at home before and our presence neither delayed nor restrained the work of plunder and devastation. But, papa, there is a stronger reason yet why you should go with us; think of the oath of allegiance, that fearful oath; you cannot subscribe to that!" she added with a shudder.

"Never, my daughter! May God in mercy paralyze my tongue before He ever permits me to perjure myself. But they may not administer the oath, at least for some time."

"We have no right to expect exemption from their uniform custom. When they occupy a place they always do administer it, if not to the citizens generally, at least to a selected number, of whom you would most probably be one. If you refuse, the penalty will be banishment; banishment either North or South. If South, it would be the very same exile that you now fear, except that you would probably be sent off at a moment's warning, whereas if you go now you can go at your leisure, and take with you whatever comforts you please. But if you should be sent North to a prison, or at best among strangers and enemies, without friends, old and infirm, and broken down in mind and body,—oh, papa! what would become of you, what would become of me then?"

"I have thought it all over, my daughter," Mr. Cameron replied, sadly but firmly, "and I have decided to stay. I must keep the old Hall, Julia, if I can, not so much for myself as for you and Walter. I shall not need it much longer myself; but what would you children do without a home?"

"We would rather do without it, papa, than to have you

try to take care of it for us at such a sacrifice. Your life, your health are worth more to us than all these broad acres, more than the old Hall, dear as it is to us!"

"Ah, my child!" he answered, shaking his head sorrowfully, "you may think that you do not need a home; but, thank God, you do not yet know what it is to be without one! You may think that you can do without the means to support life; but you do not know what poverty means. All my life I have tried to shield you from it, and I intend to try and do so to the end."

"I am not afraid of poverty, papa," she answered, firmly. "I have enjoyed our luxurious style of living, and I would like to enjoy it still; but if this may not be, I hope to be able to surrender it without any vain and sinful regrets. All that concerns me now is your safety, your comfort, and I will promise to submit to anything, nay, more, to welcome anything, if I can only have my father with me!"

Mr. Cameron was deeply moved, but his purpose was still unshaken. He shook his head, and only answered:

"It cannot be, my daughter, it cannot be. We must not all desert the old Hall."

Julia was silent a moment, and then suddenly a new thought struck her, and she exclaimed:

"Then, papa, do you go and leave Grace and myself to take care of the Hall. If there is any manliness in the Federal army, it will protect rather than injure both the persons and the property of two defenseless women."

"I should think that experience had already taught you, Julia, how much manliness is in them, how much courtesy to expect at their hands! No, no! Not for all the homesteads in Virginia, not for all in the Southern Confederacy would I leave you here in the country alone and unprotected. I have listened to your arguments, my daughter, rather for the purpose of gratifying you than with the expectation of hearing anything which has not already suggested itself to my mind. This is no sudden whim or caprice of mine. I have long ago pondered what I should do in case of a Federal occupation. It only remains now for you to say if you will acquiesce in my decision."

"Yes, sir," she answered, "I will certainly do what you think best, and what will most conduce to your comfort."

"How soon will you go, my daughter?"

"Just as soon, papa, as you wish it."

"Can you go to-morrow?"

"To-morrow!" she exclaimed. "Oh, papa! not so soon as——"

A glance at her father's face of agony stopped her short; and

while she was vainly trying to give utterance to her willingness to go, he murmured, sadly:

"Yes, to-morrow. The sooner it is over the better for us all! Go, my children, go at once," he continued, every word costing a struggle, "and get ready to leave to-morrow."

Julia went up to her father in silence, pressed a kiss upon his quivering lips, and then rushed out of the room.

His eyes followed the retreating figure of this, his last child, and when she was out of sight, the desolate old father sank back in his chair and wept bitterly.

As Grace passed the little organ-room, she paused a moment at the threshold and looked wistfully at the open instrument. She had no time to play now, and brushing away the tear from her cheek and hastening on to her duty, she murmured:

"Agnes's grave, and Agnes's organ! Two strong ties to bind my heart here. God help me to go willingly!"

When Julia reached her room, the first thing that she did was to throw herself upon the bed and let her tears relieve her burdened heart. She had done this so much oftener of late than ever before, that she began to fear she was losing her self-control; but whatever experience of the discipline of life Julia might have had before, her troubles were now both heavier and more numerous than they had ever been, and this new and most unexpected one had made her cup full. For the time she forgot everything; forgot even that she would be accessible to her husband. The one absorbing thought was that she was going to leave her old and sorrow-stricken father alone, and that, too, at a time when he would most need the sunshine of home and the solace of its ties to counterbalance the depressing influences around him. In the midst of her distress the door opened, and Mammy Nancy came in. She paused a moment in surprise, and then going up to the bed, said, compassionately:

"What's the matter, Miss Julia? What you cryin' for, honey? I ain't used to seein' you cry. I thought for a minute that 'twas my t'other child, till I remembered that she was whar she can't cry no more, thank God! What's the matter?" she repeated, as Julia buried her face in the pillow, and sobbed afresh.

As soon as she could speak, she answered:

"I am going away to-morrow, Mammy."

"Goin' away, child! and whar is you goin' to?"

"Going far away; to be gone a long time, and——"

"Goin' to leave me and old master by ourselves!" interrupted the old woman in amazement. "One of our children in the grave, the t'other one in the war, and you, the only one left, goin' away from your old father, your old mammy! I didn't believe

that you would have the heart to do sich a thing as that! What is you goin' for, child? You ain't goin' to find no sich another father, and no sich another old mammy as you leaves behind."

"I know that, Mammy," sobbed Julia. "I know that well enough. I don't want to leave you, and I know that my heart will ache many a time to see you both before I come back."

"Then what makes you go, child?"

"Papa wants me to go. The Yankees are coming again, not to stay a few hours, but the whole winter. You know how badly they behaved when they were here before, and——"

"I reckon I do!" she interrupted. "I reckon that I'll never forgit that pile of blazin' meat while thar's breath left in my body! Good sound bacon, the like of which them Yankee rascals never seed before, smoked with hickory wood, and with all them hams sewed up in bags by my own hands! Lord, Lord!" she exclaimed, impatiently, "whenever I thinks of that meat I gits riled all over!"

Mammy's indignation had now quite overpowered her sympathy and compassion, and forgetting everything except her wrath, as she always did whenever she recollected that scene of destruction, she went on in a tirade of mingled lamentation and abuse, until she was recalled to the present by a deep sigh from Julia. In turn her anger was as quickly forgotten, and intent only on comforting the young mistress, whose distress was the more painful because it was so unusual, she said:

"Tell master, Miss Julia, that you don't want to go away, and then I'll be bound he won't send you. He never could cross you hisself, and he wouldn't let nobody else do it, from the time that you was a baby in the arms, and I know he can't do it now, when you is a woman grown."

"I have told him that I don't want to leave him; but he says that he will be better satisfied if Grace and I are out of the way of the Yankees."

"Miss Grace! Is she goin' too?"

"Yes, Mammy, we are both going."

The old woman shook her head sadly, and murmured, rather to herself than to Julia:

"Poor old master! Poor old master! I remember the time when he had a young wife and his children all around him, and when thar wasn't no time 'twixt sun-up and sun-down that you couldn't hear the children laughin' and rompin' in the yard. Now wife dead, children some dead, and t'others gone, and he left by hisself in his old age! Poor old master!"

For this Julia had no reply except a fresh burst of tears; and Mammy's thoughts wandered back through long years, when the

now sad and silent Hall was lightened by children's happy faces and gladdened by their innocent mirth. They were both silent for several minutes, and then all at once Mammy's thoughts with a sudden rebound came back to the present emergency with its pressing necessities.

"To-morrow!" she said, thoughtfully. "You give yourself mighty little time, Miss Julia. I must take my old bones out of this cheer," she added, rising to go, "and git down stars to my business. It'll be all I can do to git Lucy ready to go by to-morrow. She's got all her clothes in the tub now. I 'spose in course you is to take her along?"

"I should like to do so, Mammy, if you are willing."

"Willin', child!" she replied, stopping short and looking at Julia in amazement. "What's the reason I wouldn't be willin'? Did you ever hear of my sayin' that I wasn't willin' for Lucy to go anywhar 'long with you?"

"No, Mammy, never; but times are different now."

"How different, Miss Julia?"

"You know, Mammy, that when the Yankees come, they say that they are going to set you all free, and then you need not go anywhere with your master or mistress unless you want to. I will not force Lucy to go with me now. I will not take her unless you and she are both perfectly willing."

"I'll answer for us both. I'm willin', and so is Lucy, and if she ain't, I'll make her so. And as to them Yankees, Miss Julia," she added, contemptuously, "don't tell me nothin' at all about them and their freedom. I don't believe nothin' they say, for people that ain't got no better sense than to burn up good sound bacon, ain't got no better principles than to tell lies! That's the gospel truth!"

So saying, she closed the door with a most decided emphasis, and disappeared.

Julia was in the act of rising from the bed to commence packing, when Mammy's head again appeared at the door.

"You is goin' to Dixie, in course?" she said.

"Yes."

"Well, ain't you goin' to take nothin' at all to eat? Folks tells me that it's mighty nigh starvation out thar!"

"Yes, Mammy, I am going to take plenty to eat, and I want you to attend to that for me. Get out of the pantry what you think will be necessary to last us several days, and tell Aunt Sally to cook her best for me. It is the last time," she added, choking, "that she will do anything for me in a long time."

"Did you send Sally word to put on a ham?" she asked. "It ought to be bilin' this minute."

"No, I do not intend to take a ham. There are only two left, and I want papa to have them."

"You shall have a ham, honey," she answered, with a conscious look, "and master shan't miss none, neither. This old nigger didn't stand close by that burnin' pile and watch it for nothin'! You shall have a ham."

"Very well, Mammy, I leave it all to you. Have a plenty for us, but don't be extravagant. Remember that papa is going to stay at home, and provisions are not so abundant as they used to be."

"You'll have enough, child, certain," she replied, closing the door, "if old Mammy fixes it! I always did believe in havin' plenty to eat."

"Send Lucy here, Mammy," called Julia.

The old woman came deliberately back, and shutting the door as if afraid of being overheard, she walked up close to Julia, and said, in a decided tone:

"Let me tell you one thing, child. When Lucy comes up here, don't you ax her if she is willin' to go 'long with you. Jest tell her to wash and iron her clothes and put 'em in her trunk, for she's got to go away with you in the mornin'. Don't be puttin' no new-fangled notions in Lucy's head. She's a nigger now, she's got to be a nigger all her life, and all the Yankees under heaven can't make her nothin' else, and 'tain't no use to make her believe that she's white and free!"

When Uncle John came in the afternoon, great indeed was his surprise at this most sudden and unexpected arrangement.

"Who is to be your escort, Grace?" he asked.

"Uncle Billy," she answered, "is to act in the several capacities of escort, protector, and driver."

"Now, that shall not be!" he exclaimed, positively. "I am not going to have you two knight-erranting through the country at such a time as this. I will go with you myself first."

"Indeed you will not, Uncle John," said Julia. "The weather is too cold, and there is really no necessity for it. I am not afraid to go with Uncle Billy."

"Nor need you be, my daughter," said her father. "Billy is old and steady and faithful, and will take as good care of you as I could. If I did not know this I would not trust you with him."

"Very well, girls," said Uncle John, smiling, "you are welcome to my services if they would be agreeable, but, of course, you are at liberty to decline them."

When he went away, he said:

"I like to put off disagreeable things to the last moment, and

therefore will not say good-by to-night. You will pass through town to-morrow, and you may stop at my gate and we can say farewell then."

Early the next morning, Mr. Cameron was at the stable examining the carriage and harness, and giving minute directions to the old driver, into whose care he was about to commit his daughters.

"I have trusted you often before, Billy," he said, "and you have never disappointed me, and I expect you to be faithful now. You will take good care of your young mistresses, won't you?"

"Don't give yourself no uneasiness about 'em, master," he said. "If these two old mules will hold out, Billy will too, and if I don't take 'em safe, it'll be the fust time that I ever come out wrong end foremost."

Mr. Cameron took leave of his daughters in the library. In all his other sorrows Julia had never seen him so overpowered, and she painfully realized how broken he was in spirit and energy thus to yield so unresistingly to his grief.

The servants all gathered round the carriage to say farewell, and Mammy encircled Julia in her arms, and pressing her to her bosom, kissed her repeatedly, while her tears fell fast.

"Mammy," sobbed Julia, "don't go to the Yankees when they come. Don't leave papa, the old Hall, and your two last children. It would break my heart to come back and not find my old Mammy!"

"Go to the Yankees, indeed!" she answered, wiping her eyes and bristling with indignation at the bare suggestion. "They may fool some of these young creturs, but they'll find Nancy too old for 'em. No, indeed! When I leaves my master it'll not be to go with any fool that burns up meat!"

They were gone. As far as she could see the old house, Julia's eyes were strained to catch a last glimpse of it, and when it was finally hidden from her view and she had turned her back upon her childhood's home, not knowing that she would ever return to it again, or if she did, that she would find her father and his servants there as she had left them, she sank back in the carriage and wept bitterly. When she raised her eyes again they were passing through the grove, and the first thing that she saw was the rock under the old walnut-tree, so identified with memories of her childhood, and her childhood's companions, Walter and Eva. She did not look up again until they had stopped before Uncle John's gate, where he was standing, with gloves on, and whip in hand.

"Where are you going, Uncle John?" she asked.

"With you, my daughter. You do not look able to take care of yourself, nor does Grace."

"Indeed, Uncle John," she answered, "I cannot consent to any such arrangement. It would be selfish for me to do so."

"Your consent, Julia, will not affect my decision. I know," he added, smiling, "that it is contrary, both to etiquette and to custom, for a gentleman thus to persist in intruding his society upon ladies when it is so manifestly disagreeable; but I think that the present circumstances will justify it. Drive on, Billy; I will follow."

So saying, he sprang into his buggy, and they began their journey.

It was a wild, unsettled country through which they traveled. The road had once been a highway, but had for years yielded its importance to the railroad. It was now bad everywhere, and in many places almost impassable. Swollen streams without bridges or ferries, and deep and dangerous ruts and mud-holes, rendered the journey not only difficult and fatiguing, but perilous, too, especially to travelers unacquainted with the country; and Uncle John felt anxious all the time, and the old driver kept his eye far ahead, looking and hoping for a better road, and more than once, during the first day, he muttered to himself:

"I promised master to take 'em safe, but it looks like I ain't gwine to do it! I didn't bargain for no sich roads as these."

It was the afternoon of the second day, verging toward night-fall, and they were still several miles distant from the house where they expected to spend the night, and a dark and dreary wood, where the road was entangled by brush and undergrowth, had still to be traversed. The poor tired mules had been coaxed and urged on until it seemed cruel to make them quicken their lagging steps, and yet the travelers had had such descriptions of this forest that they were extremely anxious to get through it by daylight. They were worn out as much by apprehension and anxiety as by fatigue; but rest was still far off, and they looked with dread, first upon the edge of the wood, which now became visible in the distance, and then at the sun, which was approaching the horizon far too rapidly for their wishes.

The carriage and buggy had just safely passed through a deep and dangerous mud-hole, and, with a sigh of relief, Julia threw herself back in the carriage as she heard Uncle Billy crack his whip and urge his mules to greater speed. They were not destined, however, to go on without further trouble, and their progress was at once arrested by shouts and screams from Bob, whose baggage-wagon was stuck fast in the mud.

"Get up, Yank! Pull up, Confed!" he shouted. "Go 'long,

boys!" he repeated, accompanying his exhortation with a blow to each that made their ribs resound. "Pull up, you lazy rascals!"

But entreaties, blows, and reproaches were alike lost upon the incorrigible mules, who only reared and floundered at each blow, sinking deeper and more hopelessly at every plunge.

The difficulty now threatened to be a serious one. Deeper and deeper sank the wagon, and Bob now exchanged his words and blows to his mules for entreaties to Uncle Billy to come to his relief. But the old man did not move. He stood up in his seat on the carriage and looked over the top of it with wrath and contempt blazing in his eyes, and muttering inaudibly to himself. After waiting a few minutes, Uncle John seconded Bob's entreaties, and said:

"Can't you help him, Billy? We must not waste time here. Night is coming on, and the ladies are very tired and anxious to get to their stopping-place."

Thus exhorted, old Billy, without a word of reply, got down, unharnessed his own mules, and with their assistance the wagon was, with great difficulty, extricated from the mud, and once more placed on terra firma. The harness was broken in several places, and he proceeded in silence to tie it up with strings and ropes. But the old man's gathering wrath could no longer be controlled, and stopping suddenly in his work, he looked fiercely at Bob, and rolling his eyes at him, exclaimed:

"You stupid, obstinate, leather-headed, punkin-faced——"

He paused, either for want of invectives or because he thought that the unfortunate object of his ire was unworthy even of abuse, and turning to Uncle John, he said:

"Master John, would you b'lieve it, sir? would you b'lieve that on top of the ground thar was a big enough fool to 'spect a Yankee and a Confed to pull together in the same harness? And yit, sir, jest sich a fool as that stands thar before you," he added, pointing with the utmost scorn to Bob, who stood with a downcast, sheepish look, afraid to open his mouth in reply; "a thick-skull'd nigger that didn't have no more brains hisself, and when I told him better he wouldn't pay no attention, but thought that old Billy's sense had done wore out wid age. Now, sir, I told him not to harness them two together. I told him that jest as sure as he hitched Yankee and Confed together, the very fust tight place he got into, one or t'other would be sure to kick up and leave him and the wagon stalled. And sure enough, here it is!"

Uncle John could not help laughing, as he replied:

"And so that is the difficulty, Billy, is it? Bob has harnessed a Yankee and a Confederate together!"

"Yes, sir," he answered, waxing more and more indignant; "that is jest it, and I tell you that if them trunks in that wagon hadn't belonged to them thar ladies that I promised master to take care of, that chap and his mules might have stuck in the mud till judgment-day before old Billy would have helped 'em out! And," he added, looking at Bob as if he were about to seize him, "I've a great mind to pitch you back in thar anyhow! If I only had somebody else to drive the wagon, I'd do it sure, and leave you thar till I come along agin. Maybe by studyin' 'bout it for three or four days in a mud-hole on a empty stomach, you'd find out better next time than to 'spect a Yankee and a Confed to pull the same way, you leather-headed rascal, you!"

Uncle John was heartily amused, and even his companions, sad and tired as they were, could not help joining in the laugh. But old Billy was in sober earnest.

"Don't laugh, Master John," he said. "Sich stupidity as that ain't no laughin' matter."

"And yet, Billy," answered Uncle John, "Bob is not the only fool in the world. I know some statesmen who, at this very day, believe that a Yankee and a Confed can be made to pull together."

"Some who, Master John?"

"Some statesmen, Billy."

"And who is they? Is they white people?"

"Yes, Billy, white men."

"Well, the Lord help 'em!" said the old man compassionately. "If they never finds out before what fools they's been, they'll find it out in the fust mud-hole that they come to, sure! One or t'other 'll kick up, sartain!"

The harness was now mended, and everything in readiness to resume their journey, but old Billy, with the loquacity of his race, showed no disposition to stop talking until he was again reminded by Uncle John of the lateness of the hour. He mounted on his seat, and gathering up the reins, flourished his whip with apparent carelessness, but with so accurate an aim, that the end of the lash came into stinging contact with Bob's hand. Thus admonished, he quickly found his place, and the travelers proceeded on their journey.

Just at sunset they reached the wood. It was already night in its dark and gloomy recesses, and as he was about to enter, old Billy drew up for an instant, and glancing at a scarcely-defined road, beset with stumps and undergrowth, he muttered:

"A feller who's gwine to drive over that road for the fust time in the night, ought to stop right here and say his prayers. Them stumps looks like they was planted thar jest a purpose to make a man upset!"

The road was indeed a difficult and dangerous one, and it often seemed as if with all his watchfulness and skill, the careful old driver could not get through safely. Before long, thick, black night settled down upon them, and they could not see their horses' heads. Billy, who was in advance, now stopped and called out:

"'Tain't no use to try, Master John. A owl couldn't see 'long here, and I can't drive another step widout a light. I never could see no sense," he grumbled, "in makin' any sort of a carriage widout lamps. If this here barouche had lamps I could strike a light and go on, but I ain't willin' to risk it in the dark with these ladies."

"I have candles and matches, Uncle Billy," said Julia. "You shall have a light in a minute."

"But I can't do nothin' with it, Miss Julia, when I gits it. Thar ain't no lamps, and the wind would blow it out in a minute."

"But I will get out and carry it in front of the carriage so that you can see how to drive."

"Now, Miss Julia," he said, "you know that's impossible. The last thing master said to me was, that he trusted you to me, and I must take good care of you, and I promised to do it. It wouldn't look like it, sure, for me to let you git out of the carriage in the dead o' night and walk along to light the road. You walkin' and me ridin'! No, no, that won't do."

"Well, let Lucy do it, then," said Uncle John. "She can carry a candle."

"That's the very idea!" exclaimed old Billy in delight. "Git out of that carriage, Lucy," he said, in a tone of authority, "and tote that candle, and tote it steady too, and let it go out if you dar."

Lucy took the candle, and walked on a few minutes, when a gust of wind extinguished the feeble light, and left them in utter darkness.

Old Billy was furious.

"You blockhead, you!" he shouted. "That candle never would have blowed out in my hand! Lord! Lord!" he added, wonderingly, as if trying to account for the superior wisdom of which he felt himself possessed, "what is the reason that niggers has to git most old enough to die 'fore they has any sense at all?"

"Never mind, Uncle Billy," said Julia, soothingly, "we will

try again. Lucy and I will each take a candle, and then if one should be blown out the other will be left."

This time he made no objection to the proposition, and watched her in silence as she lighted the candles; but when he saw her wrap her shawl tightly around her as she shivered with cold, he shook his head and said, deprecatingly:

"'Tain't right, Miss Julia; sure as you're born, 'tain't right! I hope master won't blame me for this, for indeed I don't see nothin' else to be done. If I don't have a light I'll have to stay right here all night, that's sure!"

"And this is a great deal better, Uncle Billy," she answered cheerfully, "than staying here all night. Drive on now, and we will soon be over this bad road."

So saying, she and Lucy walked on in front, and their candles lighted the road so that he could drive safely. They shielded them carefully with their hands, and for a little while they burned brightly and steadily, but another unexpected blast extinguished them both at once, and again they were left in darkness.

The company of her mistress fortunately saved Lucy this time from censure and invective; but, obliged to lay the blame somewhere, Billy now began to abuse the candles.

"Candles ain't no account nohow, and never was!" he muttered; "I'd rather have one good blazin' pine torch than all the candles in old Virginny!"

"That is a good idea, Billy," said Uncle John, "and I will act upon it. You shall have pine torches."

They were soon procured, and now the bright, red glare blazed up high, and lighted the road some distance ahead. The mules were urged on, and Lucy and her mistress found it difficult to drag their aching limbs along fast enough to keep ahead of the carriage.

The road seemed interminable, and when, to their great relief, they emerged from the wood on the other side, it was still found impossible to drive over it without a light. For three weary miles the patient guides dragged themselves along without murmur or complaint, and it is not surprising that in this, their first experience of exile, they should have thought wistfully and longingly, and it may be tearfully too, of the rest and shelter and comfort of that home so far behind. At last, faint with exhaustion and benumbed with cold, they reached the expected shelter, whose repose and refreshment were not merely acceptable, but were now absolutely necessary to the worn-out travelers.

On the evening of the fourth day they drove into the little village that was the end of their toilsome journey. Julia, more dead than alive, was leaning back in the carriage with her eyes

closed, when she was suddenly aroused by Uncle Billy's voice exclaiming :

"Jest look yonder, Miss Julia ! Sure as you're born, yonder is Master Charles standing on them steps !"

The carriage stopped at the door of the hotel, and there, on the steps, sure enough, stood Charles Beaufort. Julia uttered a low cry of joy, and was received, almost fainting, in his arms.

The next morning Charles accompanied Julia and Grace to Richmond, where his father was to meet them and take them to his home in South Carolina.

The parting with Uncle John was opening their wounds afresh. Encompassed with so many unusual dangers and uncertainties, the farewells of friends at that time were no ordinary adieus, brightened by the anticipation of coming reunion. They were more like the mournful separations of death and the grave, and when hearts and families were sundered, then the bitterness of parting was intensified by the painful uncertainty that overhung all the future.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FEW days after Uncle John reached home the enemy came into Hopedale, and their active operations in making themselves comfortable argued indeed a long sojourn. The most eligible situations in and around the town were selected for encampments ; tents were pitched, and soldiers busy in building chimneys, whose fuel was to be partially supplied by the fences of the town and the plantation fence-rails of the adjoining country. Lists were taken of all the property holders of secession principles, and in some instances the family were ordered to leave their home, which was appropriated by Federal officers, and in others they were all confined to two or three rooms, and the remainder of the house occupied by the enemy. As soon as they were settled in the town, as naturally as water seeks its level, the soldiers of the Federal army sought theirs in the society of the kitchens and negro cabins of the Southern gentlemen. Nor was this confined to the rank of private. Straps and stars were not unfrequently to be found in close, familiar conversation with the negro upon the street, or sitting cosily by the kitchen fire, apparently most agreeably entertained by their sable companions. Arguments,

entreaties, persuasions, and the most alluring promises were all brought to bear upon the credulity of the negro, and in most cases succeeded in persuading him, under the name of freedom, to leave the home where he had been reared, and to exchange the old master, who thoroughly understood his habits and disposition, for a new one, who was unacquainted with his nature, and could make no allowance for his peculiarities.

Uncle John's house was speedily appropriated. A flippant young officer came to take possession of all the vacant rooms, and thinking the gray-haired rebel a suitable mark for his youthful wit, he indulged it accordingly. Uncle John did not often lose his dignity, and for some time he listened in placid silence; but at last even his patience and forbearance were exhausted, for as yet all this was new to Uncle John, as well as to other Southern men, and it required months of pressure beneath the iron heel to teach them to bear in silence Yankee impertinence and oppression. When at length he did speak, there was both in his tone and words something so bitingly caustic, so keenly sarcastic, that it stung to the quick, and if his boyish enemy had dared, his revolver would in an instant have sent a ball through his heart. As it was, he said not a word in reply, but only glared savagely at him, and instantly left the house. The next day, Uncle John was officially notified that his entire house was required for the use of the United States Government. He was allowed one hour to remove his effects, which gave him ample time, since he was not permitted to take anything away except his wearing apparel. Furniture, plate, and books were all ordered to be left; and when he walked into the library at Cameron Hall, with a valise of clothing in one hand and his umbrella and cane in the other, he laughingly showed Mr. Cameron all his worldly possessions, and asked him if he could give food and shelter to a homeless wanderer.

Mr. Cameron, while he could not but regret the cause that had brought Uncle John to the Hall, was nevertheless compelled to rejoice in the result, for his first few days of lonely solitude had made him realize to what an intolerable life he was now condemned. There is no loneliness so oppressive as to sit alone in a large house which was once accustomed to resound with the merry laugh and the cheerful voice, now so still that the beating of one's own heart can be heard, or to wander through its empty halls and deserted rooms, listening to the echo of one's own footsteps. Often at his solitary meals, or as he sat hour after hour alone in the library, or wandered over the plantation with no companion but Carlo, who was himself a continual reminder of other and happier days, Mr. Cameron had felt convinced that he could not bear this long, and therefore it was that Uncle John,

always welcome at the Hall, had never been in his life half so welcome as when he appeared with his valise in his hand.

"Welcome, my dear sir, welcome!" was the hearty response to his laughing petition for food and shelter. "Never did a forlorn and lonely prisoner pine more for fresh air and freedom than I have done for a companion. The Yankees have done you a great wrong, Uncle John, but I am constrained to admit that they have at the same time conferred a favor upon me."

"Don't let the obligation burden you, my dear sir," he answered, smiling, "for, as the Irishman said when he was thanked for a kindness, 'You're welcome to it, man, but faith *I didn't mane it!*' I have no idea that the Federals were looking out for an opportunity to oblige you when they turned me out of my house."

Several weeks had passed since then, and the two gentlemen had thus far remained personally unmolested at Cameron Hall; but every day parties of straggling soldiers came out on pillaging expeditions, and to persuade the negroes to accept that freedom which they were sent to offer them. Some needed no persuasion but eagerly accepted the offered boon, and with that improvidence, which is as much a characteristic of the negro in old age as it is in childhood, they would throw their bundle of clothes across their shoulder and turn their backs upon their old homes, going they knew not where or to what, except that they were "*gwine to freedom!*" But others who were less credulous and ignorant had to be plied with stronger arguments and more persevering efforts. No means were left untried, no objections unanswered, no expectations without a promise of complete and speedy fulfillment. The work was prosecuted with an energy and constancy of purpose worthy of a better cause, and in most cases finally triumphed. Many who at first turned a deaf ear alike to their persuasions and promises were at last overcome, for negro simplicity, credulity, and ignorance cannot contend successfully against Yankee cunning, craftiness, and duplicity. But while they thus succeeded in alluring many away from their homes, they still found themselves unsuccessful in the main object of enlisting negro recruits. However anxious to be free, the negro still had an unconquerable aversion to being shot; and although his ear and heart were open to the pleasant imaginary pictures of the wealth and luxury that awaited him in his future state of freedom, yet when he was told that these had to be purchased by the risks and dangers of the battle-field, the glittering bait lost much of its luster. There was something so real, so palpable, so terrifying in the cannon's yawning mouth, the keen-edged bayonet, and the exploding shell, that these present horrors generally quite obscured the ease and enjoyment of the elysium that lay

beyond. Thus it was that the enlistment progressed slowly, and finding their persuasions so long in taking effect, and the winter gradually passing away, they finally determined at once to conscript a negro regiment, and by constant and careful drilling to prepare it for service in the approaching spring campaign.

The negroes now finding that their so-called friends were resolved to use force in compelling them to a service for which they had no inclination, resorted to every subterfuge and device to elude the conscription. They feigned sickness, physical disability, and infirmity of every kind; and when these failed, they tried concealment, and it not unfrequently happened that a family would be all at once startled by a negro (sometimes one of their own and sometimes a stranger) rushing into the house and begging for a place to hide from the Yankees who were in pursuit of him.

It was late in January, one of those wintery days of clear, bright sunshine, when the earth, bleak, sterile, and ice bound as it is, wears almost a spring smile. Mr. Derby sat in his study looking through the window upon the scene without. There was nothing of beauty in the wintery landscape, nor would he have seen it if there had been, for his thoughts were otherwise occupied. His countenance was sad, his heart heavy, his spirit worn and weary with the struggle to preserve his Christian temper amid these trying scenes and circumstances; for Mr. Derby, though a sincere Christian, was still a man, and his human nature often rebelled and chafed with the feeling of helplessness under tyranny and wrongs, and he needed the voice of God speaking to him from the pages of His own book to subdue the impatience and to quell the tumult in his heart. His prayer-book lay open before him at what had of late become its accustomed page. He often read and pondered the fourth selection of psalms, whose inspired words seemed dictated specially to meet the peculiar circumstances and temptations by which he was surrounded.

When forbearance was exhausted, and he was sick at heart with the wrong, and robbery, and insult all around him, his impatience was quelled by the gentle admonition: "Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the evil-doers, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass and be withered even as the green herb. Hold thee still in the Lord and abide patiently upon *Him*, but grieve not thyself at him whose way doth prosper against the man that doeth after evil counsels."

When anxiety had seized him, and looking upon his wife and helpless children he wondered, with painful uncertainty, how and where in that desolated and ravaged country he was to get bread

to sustain their life, his apprehensions were lulled by those words, so beautifully blending precept and promise: "Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good; dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. The Lord knoweth the days of the godly, and their inheritance shall endure forever. They shall not be confounded in the perilous time, and in the days of dearth they shall have enough."

When sometimes aggravated beyond endurance, and his human passions triumphing for the moment, he longed with his own hand to avenge the tyranny and oppression which bound his soul "fast in misery and iron," he was taught to wait patiently by God's own assurance: "The arms of the ungodly shall be broken. Their sword shall go through their own heart, and their bow shall be broken."

Now as ever heretofore, the words of promise and of comfort had stolen down deep into the minister's heart, and brought with them, for the time being at least, quiet and peace.

He was suddenly startled from his reverie by an exclamation of alarm, as his servant Charles rushed into the room, saying:

"Hide me, master! for God's sake, hide me! The Yankees are coming after me."

Before Mr. Derby could answer, his wife followed the servant, saying:

"Come here, Charles, and I will tell you where to go."

She whispered something in his ear, he darted out of the room like an arrow, and the whole scene was so like a lightning-flash, that Mr. Derby could scarcely believe that it was reality. Before he had quite recovered himself, a violent ring at the bell announced the arrival of Charles's dreaded pursuers, whom Mr. Derby himself went to receive.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, resisting that instinctive impulse of the Southern gentleman to invite across his threshold every person who comes to his door. "What will you have?"

"You can guess what we want," was the rough response.

"Indeed," said Mr. Derby, willing to prolong the parley, so as to give Charles time to reach his hiding-place, wherever it might be, "indeed I will be obliged to trouble you to tell me the object of your visit. You know," he added, smiling, "that we Southerners do not profess to be as skillful at 'guessing' as your nation."

"Look here, Bill!" exclaimed one of them, "what is the use of bartering words with that old man? We've no time to waste that way. Now, old fellow," he said, squaring himself before Mr. Derby, and striking his sword with a clang against the floor, "we've come for that colored man who ran in here a few minutes

ago. Don't say that he isn't here, for we saw him come in, and we are going to have him. So be in a hurry, and deliver him up."

Here one of the number interposed, and seemingly ashamed both of his mission and his comrade's roughness, said:

"We are sorry to intrude upon you, sir, in this way, but we are acting under orders, which compel us to impress every able-bodied negro man between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. I regret my mission, sir, but it is 'a military necessity.'"

Mr. Derby could not forbear smiling at this convenient phrase, with which he had now become so familiar, and which, most unlike charity in every other respect, resembled it at least in this, that it "covered a multitude of sins;" but before he had time to reply, he was prevented.

"Come, come, John, will you stop your talk and search these premises? And see here, stranger, you had better produce that negro forthwith, for if I do not find him here, I swear that I will burn this house over your head. So bring him out, and be quick about it too, for we have already wasted more time with you than a rebel and a secesh nigger both together are worth."

Mr. Derby bit his lip, and made no reply, but looked with a feeling of mingled pity and contempt upon this minion of despotic power, and silently awaited their further movements.

"Will you give up that colored man or not?"

"Certainly not, if he has fled to my house or my premises for protection."

"Then I will search your house; every part of it, from the garret to the cellar."

"Very well, sir, I cannot prevent it."

"And if I do not find him, you know what I will do to this house."

"You have the power; I am defenseless."

"Will you give him up?"

"I will not."

They now entered the house, went into every room, looked into every closet and under every bed, and when the object of their search was nowhere to be found, they recommenced their examination; and as if by way of compensation for their disappointment, they re-enacted the same scene that Cameron Hall had once witnessed. The contents of bureau-drawers and wardrobes were tossed upon the floor, books were scattered all over the house, and a wild scene of confusion disfigured that usually peaceful and well-ordered household.

Mrs. Derby, with her frightened children clinging to her, followed on in silence, watching with surprise and indignation this strange invasion of the sanctities of her home.

The last room that they visited was the study, and the minister could scarcely repress an expostulation as he saw his valuable theological books—valuable not only in their intrinsic worth to him in his profession, but dear to him as counselors, teachers, comforters, friends—tossed in wild confusion and irreverence over the floor. Hitherto he had felt only indignant, but now he was really distressed, and he involuntarily uttered a groan as his eyes followed a magnificent volume of “The Fathers,” as it went spinning and whirling across the room.

Just then the officer called out:

“Come, my men, this is enough of this sort of work. The negro is certainly not in the house, and while we are wasting time here he may have escaped altogether. To the kitchen and stable, boys! Look for him there.”

All the others rushed out, but the one whom they called John, and who seemed to have a remnant of conscience and feeling still left, lingered behind. He had not participated in the work of destruction, but, standing apart, had looked on the scene, watching alternately his comrades and the minister. He had heard Mr. Derby’s groan, and now coming up to him, he said:

“I regret this extremely, sir, and would most gladly keep away from all such employment. I entered the army to fight against rebels, and not to insult and injure innocent men and helpless women and children. I have not assisted in this work, and if I could, I would have immediately withdrawn from those who were engaged in it. Our orders were to conscript negroes, and not to upset households and frighten women and children. This whole scene is outrageous and disgraceful, and I am ashamed of it.”

Mr. Derby could not doubt the man’s sincerity, for his face expressed his feelings more plainly even than his words. He was about to answer him, when a loud scream announced that Charles’s hiding-place had been at last discovered. Hastening to the place of arrest, Mr. Derby found him vainly struggling between two soldiers.

When his master reached him, Charles grasped him with both hands, beseeching him to protect him, and protesting that he did not want to go.

“My poor boy,” said Mr. Derby, sadly, “how willingly would I protect you if I could! But, Charles, I cannot help you any more than you can help yourself. If they choose to take you away, I cannot prevent it.”

“Oh, yes you can, master! You can make ’em let me go. I won’t leave my wife and children, my home and master, to fight for Yankees.”

"You are not going to fight for Yankees, Sambo," said one of them, jeeringly. "You are going to fight for your own freedom, and the Yankees are going to help you do it. That is the way of it."

"I don't want no more freedom than I've got already," said Charles, doggedly, "and I ain't goin' to fight for it neither!"

"You won't, won't you? Well, Sambo, we'll soon see about that. Here boys, tie his hands."

"Not yet, master!" he pleaded piteously, "not yet! Jest let me talk to you a little while fust."

Not unwilling to prolong the scene, that he might still longer enjoy the agony of his helpless victim and his no less distressed master, the soldier answered:

"Well, talk on. I am ready to hear what you have to say."

With that accurate knowledge of human nature which the negro possesses instinctively, Charles had perceived in an instant that his air of sullen defiance would rather aggravate than modify his present distress and danger, and so exchanging it at once for an expression of abject submission and humility, he replied:

"I only wants to argufy the pint a little, master. Will you please, sir, to tell me whose notion it is to set all we colored people free?"

"Mr. Lincoln, the President of the United States, has already done it. He has proclaimed you all as free as he is himself, or as that man standing there who calls himself your master."

"What made Mr. Lincoln take sich a pertikular fancy to our color? No white man never done that before."

"Because there are not many people in the world as good as Mr. Lincoln. He thinks that it is high time for you al' to be free, and sees no reason that you should be slaves just because your skin is dark. All good people are tired of seeing you oppressed and trampled upon by your cruel secesh masters, who think no more of separating husbands and wives and parents and children than if you were a parcel of dogs."

"Master, what is you gwine to do wid me now?" asked Charles, not seeming to heed this last remark.

"We will send you to camp, where you will be taught to fight, and then you shall have the privilege of fighting for your freedom."

"Is you gwine to let me take my wife and children to camp?"

"Not exactly," replied the soldier, laughing.

"Then, master," said the negro, "Mr. Lincoln will be the fust one to separate me from my wife and children. It ain't never been done before by my secesh master."

This seemed for the instant rather unanswerable; but in a moment the soldier recovered himself, and replied:

"Not at all. White soldiers do not take their wives and children to camp. They wait until they have done fighting, and then go home to their families proud and happy."

"But 'spose they gits killed, what then?"

"Then they die a glorious death, and are buried in a soldier's grave."

Charles shook his head as if, in his estimation, the glory by no means counterbalanced the awful event; but he did not answer. Presently he said, suddenly:

"So, then, master, if I understands you, Mr. Lincoln's done offered us all freedom."

"Yes, all without exception,—men, women, and children."

"It's mighty good in him," replied Charles, thoughtfully, "and I, for one, am mightily obliged to him; but what's offered to you, you ain't bound to take unless you wants it. Now let them what wants freedom go to freedom; but, master, if you please, I'd rather stay whar I is."

Charles finished his argument with a *quod erat demonstrandum* air, that under other circumstances would have been indescribably ludicrous; but at present his vain expedients to persuade and reason with his captors only added a keener pang to the severance of the tie that bound him to his master's heart. He was only a few years younger than Mr. Derby, and had been born and reared in his childhood's home; and when the young master had left the paternal roof to make his own way in the world, of all the family circle, his servant alone could accompany him. Together they had traveled thus far on the journey of life. No thought of separation except by death had ever entered the mind of either master or slave. Their interests were identified, and Charles always spoke, as his master did, of "*our* children," "*our* house," "*our* garden," as if he were joint proprietor, and so he felt himself to be, and indeed was, in all save expense and responsibility. Mr. Derby had performed the ceremony when Charles was married, had baptized and buried his children; and in the tie that bound him to his servant, the minister realized what the Apostle meant when he exhorted Philemon to regard Onesimus "not as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved."

The master now stood looking on this remarkable scene with a darkened brow and a bitter feeling of helplessness which he had never before experienced. The disrespectful word, the contemptuous sneer, he had received with a quiet smile; the intrusion upon the privacy of his home and the wanton destruction

of his property he had witnessed without a word of complaint or an entreaty to desist; but this was a trial harder to bear than personal insult or loss of property. The excited Southern blood boiled in his veins, and his indignant heart swelled almost to bursting, as he crushed back the words of bitter reproach that struggled to his lips, and which he would, at the instant, have given worlds to utter. But he restrained it all, and like his Master, the minister "answered nothing."

The only reply that Charles received to that conclusion of his argument which was so entirely satisfactory to himself, was the imperative command, enforced by a rough touch upon the arm:

"Come along, Sambo, we're going now."

"Goin' whar, master?"

"Why, with us to be sure. That is what we came for, and that is what you have to do."

"But, master, I don't want to go. I prefers to stay."

"That makes no difference; you will have to go."

"I won't go one step," he answered, his former sullenness all returning, and struggling vainly to get away. "I won't go one step. If you takes me, you'll have to tote me."

"There's a way of making you go without toting you, old feller," said one of the men, clicking his pistol. "This little article has never yet failed to make men walk, and walk fast, too."

Mr. Derby now became seriously alarmed, for the pistol was in the hands of a ferocious-looking creature by whom bloodshed might be regarded as pastime, and so, approaching Charles, he said:

"Go, my poor boy, go. It is useless to resist, and it will only make your time the harder."

He extended his hand, which was eagerly grasped by Charles, and, in a choking voice, Mr. Derby said:

"Good-by, Charles,—good-by, my faithful boy! God bless you! and if we never see each other again in this world, may we meet in that better one where—" he could not restrain the words, they would force themselves out—"where tyranny and oppression are unknown!"

"Hallo, there!" exclaimed he with the pistol. "That's treason you're talking, and by——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in the mingled cries and lamentations of Charles and the children, who just began to realize that he was really going away.

His hands were crossed and tied, and with a guard on each side, he was led away.

"Oh, master!" he exclaimed, with a tone and look of reproach, "is you gwine to let 'em take me off, sure enough?"

"Charles, Charles," replied his master, stung to the quick, "indeed I cannot help it. If I could, believe me that you should never leave me."

"Won't you go to the gineral and git me off?"

"I will try, Charles, if you wish it; but it will do no good. He will not let you come back to me."

"Yes, sir, he would. I know he would! Try, master, only promise to try, and——"

His entreaties grew fainter and fainter as he was borne away from his master and his home; but even after his words had become inaudible, his pleading tones came back to his master's ear and smote him to the heart.

"This is absolutely intolerable!" exclaimed Mr. Derby to his wife, as the last one of the soldiers passed out of the gate. "If I could only make him understand my helplessness; if I could only convince him that no entreaties of mine would avail anything, I could bear it better; but to see him go off believing firmly that his master can control Yankee soldiers as easily as he has ever governed him, and yet will not try to rescue him,—this is intolerable, absolutely intolerable!"

When they returned to the house, they were at once reminded of the necessity of action, and they had just succeeded in clearing a space large enough for the dinner-table, when Mr. Cameron came in.

He looked around, and only said:

"Yankee spoliation, of course!"

"Even so," replied Mr. Derby, sadly. "This seems bad enough, but it is nothing to the scene through which I have just passed with my boy Charles, whom they have taken away."

"I saw the poor fellow in the street as I came along. His wife and children had just heard the news, and were clinging to him, crying and screaming, and refusing to be comforted by Yankee promises of speedy reunion. When he saw me he called out, begging me to plead with the general, and to tell you to do the same, and he seemed to feel sure that our united efforts would be successful. I have just passed through the same scene on my plantation, and I scarcely know what brought me to town unless it was a heart-sick longing to change the scene; but it has been no change, for I find the same thing going on here. Poor negroes!" he added, thoughtfully, "victims of a so-called philanthropy, from my soul I pity them!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Derby, "they are truly to be pitied. With his attachment to home, his improvidence, his indolent nature,

and his dependence upon 'master' for everything, the negro will truly be an object of profoundest pity, when in a strange land he shall have awakened from his golden dreams of freedom to find himself naked, freezing, starving, and to long with unutterable but hopeless longing for his old log-cabin, his blazing fire, his 'patch,' his poultry-yard, but above all, for his old master! Were any of yours, sir, willing to go?"

"Oh yes! A great many went not only willingly, but gladly; others with stolid indifference; and a few with a struggle that it almost broke my heart to witness. For those who wanted to leave me, I have neither a regret nor a feeling of sympathy, and if ever I hear of their suffering, I will listen to the tale without an emotion of pity."

"I differ with you there, Mr. Cameron. I feel profoundly sorry for them all. Negroes, like children, are credulous, and their imagination is easily caught by an attractive picture. You know what promises have been made them,—of farms, coaches and horses, elegantly furnished houses, and the advantages of education! Accustomed to be provided for, without forethought or anxiety of their own, they do not stop to ask, as any other race of beings would, who is to supply all these things; but they repose quietly in the belief that Master Lincoln or some other master will, for the mere love of them, give them all these promised luxuries, just as their former master has supplied them with the necessities of life. Indeed, Mr. Cameron, taking into consideration the nature of the negro, and the temptations brought to bear upon him, I must acknowledge that I am neither surprised nor indignant that so many should swallow the glittering bait."

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Derby, I am surprised. Credulity I know is a striking characteristic of the race, and if the Abolition army had never deceived them, I should not wonder at their being misled by these alluring promises. But at the very moment that they are promising them everything that their cupidity can desire, the soldiers are pillaging their cabins and stealing from them everything valuable that they possess,—sometimes even their 'Sunday-clothes.' Now, here is such a gross and palpable contradiction between promises and actions, that it would seem as if the most obtuse negro upon earth could not fail to see the inconsistency; and when in spite of all this I see them willing and even anxious to go off with their so-called friends, I confess that I have no pity, but see them go with a sort of grim satisfaction in the thought of what is certainly in store for them. It is only for those who were torn away by force from me and from their home, that I feel any pity; and their own helplessness, together with that of the master upon whose protection

they have always been accustomed to rely, and whose failure to help them now they can never be made to understand, has been to me this day the severest struggle of my life. Never before have I been called to bear anything like it; and when I saw those negroes dragged off, and heard their piteous cries for the help which I could not give them, I confess, sir, that for the moment I felt more like a demon than a man, and if my power could then have been made commensurate with my will, and my arm nerved with omnipotence, the whole Yankee nation would have been annihilated in an instant."

"It is very hard to bear sir,—very, very!" repeated Mr. Derby, as if every word came from the very bottom of his heart.

"Ah, Mr. Derby," said his companion, "how much sickly sentimentalism has been wasted upon the oppression of the poor slave, and especially upon the merciless separation of families! but you and I, slaveholders as we are, and have been all our lives, have seen more of it during the reign and rule of their Yankee friends than we ever saw before. Oh, Philanthropy! Oh, Religion!" he added, bitterly, "how much wrong, and robbery, and injustice are often perpetrated under your sacred names!"

"Unfortunately, that is true, Mr. Cameron; and this war is a painful illustration of how much *wrong* may be done under the name of *right*, how much *oppression* under the name of *liberty*. Whatever fictitious and specious titles may have been given to it to insure its sanction in the eyes of the world, the facts have at last developed it to be nothing more nor less than a crusade against the slaveowner. To liberate the slave from a cruel bondage is now its avowed purpose; to despoil and impoverish his master is its real object; and to effect this, the slave himself is unhesitatingly sacrificed."

"Yes, Mr. Derby, and to prove this truth you need only point to the position assigned the negro brigades before Vicksburg, and elsewhere, where they have been made literally breast-works, behind which their loving white brethren intrenched themselves and protected their own more valuable lives. Ah, sir! for how much woe and weeping, for how much misery and bloodshed, for how much tyranny and oppression, is Puritan fanaticism responsible in beginning and carrying on this fearful war!"

"Truly," replied Mr. Derby, thoughtfully, "Puritanism has much to answer for in this matter."

"It is responsible for it all, sir," said Mr. Cameron, with earnestness. "This war can all be traced to that bigotry and fanaticism which would bind the galling chains of its own notions and prejudices upon the hearts and consciences of the whole world. Now, sir, if slavery be a sin, that is our business, not

theirs. We are responsible to God, and not to them for it; we are the transgressors, and on our heads would the penalty rest; and if their godly precepts, enforced by the power of their stainless example, cannot persuade their blind and erring brethren to leave off their great transgression, then let these pious Puritans content themselves with removing far away from the contagion, and like the Pharisee of old, with uplifted heart and eye, thank God that they are not as other men, nor even as the Southerner! Ah, Mr. Derby! if these Puritans would only imitate their Divine Lord, and temper their pretended zeal for His cause with that gentleness which Himself enjoined; if they would only in the lesser matter follow the example which He has set them in the greater, and propagate their opinions as He did His religion, by argument and entreaty, instead of compelling men by fire and sword, then perhaps we might listen; and even if unconvinced, we would at least believe in their sincerity and respect their honesty. But such a course, however sanctioned by the Holy Redeemer, comports not with Puritan sanctity and Puritan bigotry. Individuals, nations, the world, nay, even the Word of God itself, must be amended to suit Puritan notions, and whoever dares believe that slavery is right, when the Puritan has pronounced it wrong, must be punished for his presumption and impiety. May God in His great mercy defend our nation, regenerated in the baptism of blood, from all admixture of Puritanism! May He save our Southern Confederacy from all Puritan influence in Church and State! Everywhere, and in all times and circumstances, may He defend us from the moral taint of Puritanism!"

The minister, while he responded heartily to every word of his friend, could not forbear smiling at his mingled bitterness and earnestness. He saw that Mr. Cameron was greatly excited, and even in the midst of his own depression Mr. Derby could not resist the temptation to indulge in that quiet humor which he always enjoyed. So he said, with a smile, but in a serious tone:

"You are hard, Mr. Cameron, upon the descendants of the crew of the May-Flower; those noble Pilgrim Fathers, whose heroism, fortitude, courage, and, above all, brave determination to have 'freedom to worship God,' have been, since the foundation of the Republic, held up to the love and reverence of Southerners; first in the picture-books of the nursery, then in the school-books of our academies and colleges, and finally in the poetry, painting, and sculpture which form the more elevated pleasures of our maturity. Indeed, sir, you ought not to speak so disrespectfully of our Puritan Fathers!"

Mr. Cameron looked up in surprise. Such sentiments were

not what he expected from his friend; indeed, he felt sure that they quite contradicted what he had often heard him express before; but he now spoke so seriously, that Mr. Cameron was for the moment completely baffled. Meanwhile, Mr. Derby enjoyed his perplexity, and watched, with a subdued twinkle of the eye, his increased excitement, aggravated, as it evidently was, by his own most unexpected want of sympathy.

"No fathers of mine, sir!" answered Mr. Cameron, hastily. "Thank God, there is neither a drop of Puritan blood in my veins nor a particle of Puritan spirit in my nature! If I know myself, I am willing to accord to others that liberty of thought and action which I demand for myself, and instead of trying to bind upon my neighbors my own private notions and prejudices, I rather try to square my own life and conduct to the principles of truth and justice. No, sir!" he added, "I claim neither part nor parcel in the Pilgrim Fathers."

Mr. Derby now laughed outright, and said:

"It is a pity that you are not an artist, Mr. Cameron. If you were, I would at once employ your skill upon a picture to hang in my study. I should like very much to have an embodiment of your idea of a Puritan."

"If my skill in execution, Mr. Derby, only equaled my accuracy of conception, you would have a picture true to the life. I would bring out upon the canvas the self-sufficiency which acknowledges no equal; the sourness which curdles the milk of human kindness in the heart; the bigotry which allows to none other the liberty of thought that it arrogates to itself; and the fanaticism which dares to sit in judgment upon all decrees, both human and divine, which do not square with the 'higher law' of its own devising. How would you like such a picture for your study?"

"It is quite too grim and sour," answered Mr. Derby, laughing, "to be the presiding genius of my sanctum. When I employ your artistic skill, it must be upon a more pleasing subject. When I proposed this, I did not suppose that the picture would be all shadow. I thought that you would find something to lighten it."

"Well, sir, tell me something. I want to do him justice. If you will only tell me any characteristics that will relieve those shadows, I will gladly add them to my picture."

"Then, sir, don't you think that we can at least accord to the Puritan a stern, unrelenting honesty and consistency? These I believe are generally conceded to his character."

"He has not shown them, Mr. Derby, in the conduct of this war. You see that I proceed upon the principle that we are in-

debted to the Puritan for the commencement of the war, and to Puritan influence for its prosecution. Let us look first at the honesty which he has shown. There was in the beginning a great hue and cry about the Constitution. To preserve this in its integrity, to guard this time-honored legacy of our forefathers, this safeguard of our rights, was the avowed purpose of the war. Now, however, it is becoming every day more and more apparent what its real object is, and has been from the beginning. A portion even of that same Puritan press which was at first loudest and fiercest in its cries for the support of the Constitution, now openly acknowledges it to be a war for the abolition of slavery; while the Democratic party, finding itself hopelessly entangled in a war upon false pretenses, inveighs with bitter denunciation against the Yankee cunning and the Puritan dishonesty which combined to deceive them. So much for Puritan honesty. Now let us look at its consistency. While the war was commenced for the avowed purpose of supporting the Constitution, in the prosecution of it every right guaranteed to the people by that instrument has been disregarded, every safeguard thrown down, every restraint upon executive power utterly ignored. Nor is this inconsistency any less remarkable now since the real object of the war has been acknowledged to be the abolition of slavery. Puritan philanthropy sickens at the name of slave. His tender heart and enlightened conscience give him no rest until he has come to burst the negro's fetters; to make him a glorious *freeman*; to bid him stand forth the equal of his master, the companion of his oppressor! Oh, glorious cause! Oh, magnanimous champion! He comes to release from ignoble bondage the stalwart, well-fed, happy negro; and a few weeks later,—oh, beautiful consistency!—he places that same negro between the cannon's mouth and himself, and as the freeman is blown to atoms he bids him rejoice that he does not die a slave! No, Mr. Derby, honesty and consistency certainly cannot lighten my picture. You must think of something else."

"You are embittered now, Mr. Cameron," replied the minister. "You are writhing and smarting under wrongs, and perhaps incapable of doing our oppressors justice."

"Smarting under wrongs I certainly am, Mr. Derby; but I trust that even this would not blind me to the good if there were any. On the contrary, I would like to find it, like to look at it even in an enemy; for, believe me, it is neither my habit nor my pleasure to picture human nature so dark."

"I know that very well, Mr. Cameron, and my knowledge of your character and disposition only convinces me how intolerable must be your grievances thus to have embittered you. I confess,

sir, that it is very hard, nay, perhaps impossible, for unassisted human nature to bear patiently the trials and indignities to which we are now subjected. For my own part, I have found, long ago, that my only safeguard was to look beyond and above these human instruments, to Him who sitteth on the heavens, and holdeth the nations in His hand. When I think of them, the fiercest passions of my nature are stirred; when I remember that 'the Lord is King,' I can trust myself, my family, my nation in His hand, satisfied that He will, in the end, work out this difficult problem satisfactorily to us all. He is scourging our nation now most severely; but if we receive the chastening as coming from Him, and faithfully and honestly try to learn the lessons that He is teaching, I believe that this Southern people will come out of the furnace as 'silver that is purified seven times in the fire.' The furnace is hot, but He sitteth as the refiner and purifier, and His purpose is to purge and not to consume."

"In a great national calamity like this," replied Mr. Cameron, "there are so many lessons to be learned that I should think it would be almost impossible to remember them all."

"That is true, and perhaps in the experience of individuals the lessons may be as varied as the different circumstances and dispositions; but I refer particularly to the great national lessons, those that are so patent that 'he who runs may read.' It seems to me that God is dealing very plainly with us now, and is at once rebuking our national pride and teaching us dependence."

"Dependence!" exclaimed Mr. Cameron. "Indeed, my dear sir, I should rather think that we are being taught self-dependence; for if ever I saw a nation struggling with all its determination and energy to help itself, it is the Southern Confederacy at this moment."

"That is true, Mr. Cameron. Right nobly and manfully, and right successfully, too, is our country struggling; and yet, in the retreating waves of the Red Sea, in the manna rained upon the desert, in the smitten rock and the sweetened waters, I scarcely recognize a more direct interposition of Providence than in the successful manner in which we have been thus far enabled to resist an invading foe. If ever a nation upon earth has been taught that God's blessing and favor can equalize all odds, and compensate for all deficiencies, that nation is our own; and if by our example we afford encouragement to others to try and help themselves under all disadvantages, and against all adverse circumstances, we are no less a monument to the nations, that against God's protection and favor arms and munitions of war are of no avail. Without arms or equipments, without even the necessary clothing for the army, without the sympathy, assistance, or even

countenance of the other nations of the earth, alone and unfriended by human aid, we found ourselves opposed to an enemy richly abounding in everything necessary for conquest. Surely our experience thus far in this unequal contest ought to have taught us Who it is that giveth victory in the day of battle. Surely we ought to have learned by this time to put our trust neither in chariots nor in horses, but in the name of the Lord our God. I confess, Mr. Cameron, that when I hear the self-confident boasting that talks about an invincible people, a nation that cannot be conquered, a proud, high-spirited, chivalrous race that may be exterminated but never subdued, I tremble, not for the final result, but for fear that, like rebellious Israel, it may be decreed that none of this generation shall enter into the promised rest of freedom and independence. But when on the other hand I read the words of reverent acknowledgment wherewith our great and honored Lee ever announces a victory to the chief magistrate of the nation: 'God has again crowned our arms with success;' 'God has granted us another victory,'—then, sir, I acknowledge that I feel as thankful for the message as I do for the event which it announces. A single victory is by no means a pledge of ultimate success; but such a spirit of reverent dependence upon God animating our leaders, and infused by them into the people, seems to me a sure harbinger of the final result. I believe that the nation is learning its lesson of dependence. I have watched anxiously from the beginning to see what moral effect this struggle was to have upon the people, and I think it is very evident that among all classes, from our rulers down, there is now a much stronger reliance upon God for success, and a much more grateful acknowledgment of His interposition in the hour of victory, than there was at first. Especially is this to be remarked in the army. Now, if we will only prove ourselves as ready and willing to learn our other lesson, and surrender our national pride, then indeed we may hope that our chastening has not been in vain."

"National pride!" repeated Mr. Cameron. "Indeed, sir, I cannot believe that this feeling is wrong. Who could help being proud," he added, enthusiastically, "of such a country, such a people, such an army? Who would not be proud to belong to a nation that has shown so much determination, so much energy, so much fortitude, so much valor? Mr. Derby, all my life long I have loved to hear myself called a Southerner; but I tell you, sir, that in these, my country's darkest days, I love it better than ever. It always makes me stand two inches taller."

Mr. Derby smiled, as he replied:

"I find no fault with that sort of national pride, Mr. Came-

ron. Indeed, it can scarcely be legitimately called pride, for the proper appreciation of any blessing whatsoever is rather a duty than a sin, and up to a certain point your feeling is not only natural, but right. The only danger is of allowing it to run into the extreme of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. But I refer to that sort of national pride (or vanity, rather, for that is the more correct term) which has made the United States a by-word among other nations; that vanity which found nothing anywhere upon earth, whether of natural scenery, of the useful arts and sciences, of luxury and elegance, of literature or the fine arts, superior or even comparable to what it had at home. Nor did this feeling stop here; otherwise it would have been a harmless vanity which would only have made its possessor ridiculous, and awakened a mingled feeling of pity and contempt. But it swelled into a self-reliance, self-importance, and self-satisfaction which often made us insolent and overbearing in our intercourse with other nations, and worse still, sometimes tempted us to aggression and unjust acquisition of territory, because we felt secure in our power to sustain ourselves in any course of action. This I believe to be one of the sins of which we, as formerly belonging to the United States, were guilty, and which, in the growth of our young nation, we must earnestly try to exterminate."

"Our national vanity was indeed excessive," replied Mr. Cameron; "but then, sir, you must admit that there was much in the marvelous growth of our Republic to create and foster this feeling. For a nation not yet a hundred years old to take its place side by side in wealth, power, and greatness, with others that were far advanced in civilization and refinement before its own vast solitudes had ever been trodden by the foot of the white man, would seem indeed cause enough to excite vanity. The fable of Minerva springing from the head of Jupiter in full, vigorous maturity, and even armed with the weapons necessary to make her strength respected and feared, is the only counterpart of the American nation that the world has ever known, either in truth or fiction. Indeed, sir, I do not wonder that, as a nation, we were vain."

"The temptation was a strong one," replied the minister, "but this neither excuses nor palliates the sin."

"But, Mr. Derby, neither this nor any other national sin was confined to our section of the country. How comes it, then, that we are not only the only part of the nation that is punished, but we are actually chastened by those who participated with us in the sins, and are, to say the least, just as guilty as ourselves? Are we to receive all and they none? It cannot be, for God is just."

"Tarry thou the Lord's leisure," replied the minister,

solemnly. "Our retribution for our portion of the iniquity has come first, and for some mysterious purpose of His own, God has allowed us to be chastened by those who were once our brethren; but His anger only slumbers until, like Babylon of old, the North shall have filled up the measure of her iniquities. He is using the Abolition army to bring us to repentance, submission, and dependence upon Him; but think you that their iniquities will go unavenged? To all their other sins they have now added the inauguration and prosecution of a war which, for cruelty, oppression, vindictiveness, and malignity, has scarcely its counterpart in modern times. Think you that the tears and cries of the thousands of helpless women and children, whose homes are ruinous heaps of ashes and themselves homeless wanderers, will go unheard and unheeded? Think you that the long line of devastation and destruction, the charred and blackened homesteads, that mark the progress of the Abolition army, and the thousands of once contented and happy negroes, now lured away from their homes to die of cold, starvation, or loathsome disease, uncared for and often unburied,—think you that such things as these will go unpunished? I tell you no, sir! Oppressed and suffering and desolate as the South is, I would rather be in our place than theirs, for I believe that when their day of retribution does come, it will be so awful, so tremendous, that the most revengeful of those over whom they have tyrannized will be moved to pity, and cry 'Forbear!'"

These were solemn words, to which Mr. Cameron made no reply; for there is something so appalling in the thought of a nation or an individual falling into the hands of the living God for *vengeance*, that all human wrath is at once stilled, and all thirst for revenge is quenched, and the soul shrinks and trembles with awful dread at the thought of that God who is a "consuming fire!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. CAMERON and Uncle John now led a quiet, monotonous life. For some time after Grace and Julia left, their letters occasionally found their way to the Hall, nobody knew how; but of late more rigid discipline and severer penalties had effectually cut off all communication from the South, and no news reached them from any quarter. From the time that the Federals entered Hopedale the citizens had been constantly threatened with the

Oath of Allegiance, but as yet it had never been generally and openly administered, nor was it positively known that anybody had taken it, although some persons labored under the suspicion. At first there had been no restriction upon the intercourse between the town and the surrounding country, and passports had been freely granted to come and go; but of late this privilege had been withdrawn, and now no one was allowed to leave the town, under any pretext or in any emergency, without first taking the oath. Mr. Cameron and Uncle John were therefore strictly confined at home, and instead of their former daily ride to town they were now obliged to content themselves with such exercise as the limits of the plantation allowed. Nor under the circumstances did they object to the restriction, for all that had once made those visits to town agreeable was now gone. There was nothing to be heard of the movements of our army, and all the reports that were circulated were carefully selected, so as to depress as much as possible the Southern heart. Nor was there any longer anything attractive in the appearance of the town. Its once clean and nicely-paved streets, now torn up and slovenly; its fences either entirely gone or falling down in ruinous decay; its magnificent shade trees felled and barricading the streets; its citizens downcast and dejected, and wandering about as strangers in the town which themselves had built, and which had always been their home, and jostled upon the pavements by the officer, or perchance the negro, in the uniform that, to the Southern eye and the Southern heart, spoke only of subjugation,—there was indeed little enough now in the aspect of Hopedale to make Mr. Cameron and Uncle John desire to see it. They missed Mr. Derby's society, however; nor was it a less privation to the minister, whose visits to the Hall were among his pleasantest relaxations, and who reckoned Mr. Cameron and Uncle John as among his most valued friends.

The two gentlemen were smoking in the library one morning after breakfast, when Uncle John, looking through the window, exclaimed:

"Some more visitors, Mr. Cameron! Indeed, considering the political sentiments of the Hall, it is wondrously popular with the Yankees."

"Yes," replied Mr. Cameron, smoking away quietly without moving. "One part of the establishment is certainly a favorite resort of theirs. They seem to have a great partiality both for the comfort and the society of my kitchen."

"This time, however, sir, I think they are going to honor you. At least they are riding up to the porch."

"If that be so," he answered, rising, "I will receive them my-

self, since I prefer that their visit should be made at the door instead of in the library."

So saying, he went to meet them. When he opened the door he found two soldiers, one of whom asked:

"Is this Mr. Cameron?"

"Yes, sir."

"These, then, I believe, belong to this house."

Mr. Cameron received two yellow envelopes, one addressed to himself and the other to Uncle John.

"Will you tell me, if you please, where I am to take this one? I was told that the gentleman lived in this neighborhood."

Mr. Cameron directed him how to reach the house of his neighbor, who lived on an adjoining plantation, waited to see them ride through the gate, and then returned to the library. He gave Uncle John his envelope, and at the same time opened his own.

"Just as I expected!" he said, as he glanced at the contents.

It was the Oath of Allegiance to the United States Government, utterly renouncing all sympathy with, and refusing all aid and support to, the "so-called Southern Confederacy," promising full and unconditional allegiance in all time to come to the Government of the United States, and pledging to assist and support it to the extent of personal effort and influence in all attempts to crush this infamous rebellion; and all this "without compulsion and without mental reservation."

Accompanying the oath was the order to report at headquarters, in Hopedale, on the morning of the third day from date.

"Rather a binding oath, Mr. Cameron," said Uncle John, "don't you think so? '*I solemnly affirm that I take this oath of my own free will and choice, without compulsion and without mental reservation.*' Pretty severe that, hey?"

"Rather tight, I confess, Uncle John,—so very tight, that I do not think I can bear the pressure. What say you? Are you ready to take it?"

"Quite as ready, sir, as I ever have been. I presume that we are allowed three days' grace in order that we may talk the matter over and encourage each other to subscribe to it; but as far as I am concerned, I would rather have been ordered to report to-day than day after to-morrow. I want it over."

They went on talking seriously of what was now before them, and wondering if the penalty would allow them the privilege of going to their own people, or if it would condemn them to the rigors of a Northern prison. All at once Uncle John exclaimed, laughing:

"Here comes Smithson, and from the Gilpin gait at which he is riding I suspect that the yellow envelope is spurring him on. Poor Smithson! his heart clings to those acres of his, and the oath will sorely try him."

Mr. Smithson came in, the picture of despair, and Uncle John, whose humor could not be altogether extinguished, even in circumstances like the present, said, as he shook him by the hand:

"Good morning, Smithson. You look so cheerful that you must have good news. Do give us the benefit of it, for Cameron and I have a dull time shut up here in the Hall."

"Good news!" he replied, construing Uncle John literally. "This is my good news."

So saying, he took the envelope from his pocket, and unfolding the paper that it contained, gave it to Uncle John.

"I know all about it, Smithson," he replied, "for we have just been similarly honored. It was scarcely to be expected that such rebels as you and I should have been invited to headquarters."

"Confound their invitation!" exclaimed Mr. Smithson, half surprised and extremely annoyed at Uncle John's careless, indifferent view of the matter. "I tell you, sir, that this is a serious thing, and involves serious consequences."

"There is no doubt of that, sir," replied Uncle John. "It is indeed a grave question for consideration. A dilemma, whose horns are exile and confiscation on the one hand, and treason or perjury on the other, may indeed demand to be well pondered."

"Indeed, sir, you do take a grave view of the matter. Treason, indeed! An oath extorted from you by arbitrary power is not legally binding in any code of laws upon earth, and treason is an overt act, not the breath of the lips. Indeed, sir, if I were to take that oath forty times, it would not bind my conscience with the strength of a wisp of straw. On the contrary, I should feel conscientiously bound to break it the very first opportunity that offered. To *keep* the oath would be treason; to *take* it, never!"

"I think, Mr. Smithson," said Mr. Cameron, "that you are mistaken about the breath of the lips not being treason. The United States Government certainly so regards it, and has proved it by imprisoning and banishing men for sentiments uttered in public speeches, and by closing newspaper offices for offensive paragraphs. Yes, sir: to swear allegiance to any other government than your own is certainly treason."

"Well, sir, even granting you this, there is still an open question: Which is our own government? We are in Federal lines, subject to the laws of the United States and under their protec-

tion. Now is it not true that whether we will or not, the fact remains the same, and that as long as this country is occupied by United States troops so long its government is ours, and may we not lawfully swear allegiance to it until we are restored to the protection and laws of our own?"

"I think not, sir. Your first allegiance is to your own State of Virginia, which, in the exercise of her own sovereign power, has seen fit to withdraw from that Federal compact, into which, in the exercise of that same power, she entered in the beginning. It is only by and through your allegiance to her that you can owe allegiance to any other authority, and she has chosen to incorporate herself with the Confederate States. Therefore it seems to me that your allegiance can rightfully belong only to the Confederate States, and allegiance to any other, whether voluntary or extorted, must needs be treason."

"You and I differ altogether about this matter, Mr. Cameron. I think that, externally, I am bound to be subject to the powers that be. With my inner feelings and principles they have nothing to do, and over them they certainly cannot exercise any control; but if by force of arms or the exercise of arbitrary power they extort from me an oath which my inmost soul abhors, I am not responsible to God or man for it, nor will either expect me to keep it."

"There is still another view of the question that involves grave consideration, Mr. Smithson," said Uncle John. "Solemnly to call upon God to witness the sincerity of an oath which you intend to violate at the first opportunity is nothing less than perjury. It matters not whether you take it voluntarily or by compulsion, the morality of the act remains the same. So then we have now reached a choice between treason and perjury. We may, in good faith, swear allegiance to the enemy of our country, and thereby commit the act of treason; or we may swear falsely, and thus perjure ourselves. For my own part, even between these two I could make a choice. If it were possible that any moral force could be brought to bear upon me which would necessitate a choice between the two crimes, I would choose the first. I would be ashamed to be a traitor, but I would be afraid to be a perjurer. I would take the oath and keep it. I would forswear my country, and then, hiding my head in shame and self-condemnation, would make up my mind to live and die a Benedict Arnold."

"Then, sir," replied Mr. Smithson, thoughtfully, "I presume that your decision is made, and that you do not intend to take that oath."

"Take it!" thundered Uncle John, with an energy that startled his companion. "Take it! Never, so help me God!"

"You speak very positively, sir. This contest is by no means ended yet, and our success, so far from being an accomplished fact, is to my mind at least exceedingly problematical. What if we do not succeed? The oath will certainly be required of you then. Will you still refuse? For my part, I think that it is decidedly the part of wisdom to weigh well all the contingencies and possibilities. To lose my property now, rather than take the oath, and then to be compelled hereafter to take it, would be rather unpleasant, and I think wholly unnecessary."

"In the event of our defeat, Mr. Smithson, it is very evident that the case would assume altogether another aspect. If we are overcome, we shall then have no government, and where there is no government there can be no treason. If our earnest struggle for freedom and independence should prove a failure, then I, along with the rest, must accept the result, and, a disappointed and saddened man, I must submit. But, God helping me, I will never be the one, either by word or act, to assist in bringing about such a result. While I have a government trying to guard my interests, and an army fighting for my rights, I will, like a man, bear my portion of the burden, and lend my helping-hand to sustain them, and when that government is dissolved, and that army surrenders, it will be time enough for me to surrender too, and I can then, without shame or remorse, though not without deep sorrow, swear allegiance to that government under which I find myself compelled to live."

"But then it may be too late to save yourself by the oath. Heaven knows, it is disagreeable enough at any time, and if I am to swallow the dose at all, I would rather do it in time to avail me something."

"That is a utilitarian view of the question, which does not enter at present into my argument. I am talking now of the *right* of the act, and not of its *expediency*."

"Which latter is by no means to be ignored or overlooked, sir. Expediency must always be taken into the account in worldly matters. I should think that you were an old enough man to have learned that."

"So I am, sir, and it is one of life's lessons that I learned years ago. I do not undervalue expediency in its proper place, but I object either to confounding it with principle or substituting it for principle."

"But, sir, the obstinate adherence to an idea, a chimera (as this struggle will, in the event of failure, prove itself to have been), may materially interfere with your future interests, and, it may be, with your wishes too. I presume that in any event you would prefer to spend the remnant of your life in this country."

You are too old to wander now. May it not be the dictate of wisdom so to modify any intemperance of speech, or the display of any rabid or ultra feeling, that in case you should hereafter want to retract you would be allowed to do so? Has it never been the case in political convulsions, that men have sometimes wanted to renew their allegiance to their former government, and have been denied? That they have asked the oath, and received banishment instead?"

"Indeed, Mr. Smithson," replied Uncle John, laughing, "you are a man of wondrous prudence and forethought, and provide not only for future possibilities, but, as it seems to my sanguine hopes, for impossibilities too. Anybody would imagine, from your train of argument, that the great issue was decided, the last battle fought, and the South utterly vanquished. For my part, I anticipate no such thing; but I will, for the sake of argument, admit its possibility, and will look at the prospect through your fears rather than through my hopes. But even in this event, I should have no apprehensions whatever that the privilege of taking the oath would be denied me. I do not acknowledge myself to be either a rabid or an ultra man. There is nothing which I can, under any circumstances, retract. My opinions have not been formed in the heat and excitement of passion, but they are at this day the very same that they were before the first gun had been fired, or the first sword unsheathed, in this unholy war. They are calm and deliberate convictions, founded upon unalterable principles which are utterly independent of the success or failure of this revolution. I always believed in the right of secession, and, at the beginning of this war, I was convinced of its expediency too; but I have never tried to force my belief upon others. On the contrary, I have been throughout this whole contest a man of few words, and so far as I am a judge of my own conduct, there has been nothing which can make me a proper subject for banishment or confiscation now, or, in the event of our subjugation, an object of suspicion to the Federal Government. But even if the reverse were the case, I trust that I would not allow apprehensions of the possible future to deter me from the performance of present duty. But let me tell you one thing, Mr. Smithson; something that time-serving men are apt to overlook. There is much truth in the old adage: '*Honesty is the best policy*,' although I despise the maxim because it is degrading to the noble principle to recommend it on such low and contemptible grounds. Nevertheless, it is true; in this as well as in all other cases, honesty will be found to be not only right, but the best policy too. Let two Southern men go together to-day to headquarters, the one accepting the oath, and the other refusing

it, with exile and confiscation staring him in the face. Now, I believe that if the war should end next week in the subjugation of the South, and these two men should apply to the United States Government for the same office, if the gift of that office were in the hands of an intelligent Northern man, one who understood human nature, and was acquainted with the past history of both candidates, he would unhesitatingly give it to him who had refused the oath. The reason is obvious. Men yield an involuntary homage to him who plants himself firmly and squarely upon his principles, and with manly courage and fortitude consents to meet the consequences of them. Such a man is not only respected, but he is trusted too. Do you know, sir, who, in the event of subjugation, would make the best citizens of the United States, and in what class of people that government would least dread any remaining leaven of the revolutionary element? It would be in the Lees and the Johnsons, and the brave men who followed them, in the Wilderness, and before Richmond, at Atlanta, and at Kennesaw Mountain; and at home, those who have been content to suffer privation and discomfort, loss of property and personal risk, rather than yield one iota of principle. It is such men as these that are battling now for freedom; law-abiding, order-loving men, who are not fighting from the mere outburst of a discontented, factious, revolutionary spirit, but are freemen, honestly and earnestly fighting for their rights, fighting for *principle*, and who, if overcome, will submit on principle. Of such men as these the United States Government would not be afraid. No garrisoned towns and standing army would be necessary to keep down and quell such spirits as these; but the Federal Government would rightfully distrust those who had been traitors to their own cause, and who, either from interest or fear, or some other base and cowardly motive, had uttered with their lips words to which every feeling of their nature gave the lie."

There was a short pause, and then Mr. Smithson replied, shaking his head sadly and thoughtfully:

"Ah, sir! fortunately for you, your case differs from mine. You are not hampered by family ties, and are at liberty to follow the dictates of feeling and conscience. You can go into exile unburdened by a thousand torturing anxieties about those whom you have left behind at the mercy of their enemies. But look at me, sir. I have a wife and six children. To take them with me is impossible, for I have not the means; to go and leave them, for an indefinite time, with no one to protect them and provide for them, is equally impossible to a man calling himself husband and father."

"To that, Mr. Smithson, I can only answer as I did just now, that we are discussing the moral right of the act, and not its expediency or agreeableness. It is so hard for men to separate these two things, and to look at them independently of each other. And yet, if amid the tortuous and perplexing paths of life we would find the right one, we must needs do it; we must put on, as it were, a blind bridle, that shuts out everything except what is right before us, and look at the morality of the act as it stands alone, in its stern, naked ruggedness; for when once we begin to look at results, then self-love, ease, convenience, and profit all loom up in such vast and undue proportions, that they effectually throw into shadow the question that we originally proposed to consider. Now, the difference in our situations may and does affect the amount of sacrifice involved in doing right; but the right itself it cannot alter. I admit that it will cost me far less self-denial and sacrifice of feeling to be driven into exile than it will cost you, inasmuch as I have no wife and children to leave behind; but, at the same time, I also believe that all the wives and children upon earth cannot make the act of taking that oath at this time anything less than treason or perjury. Such it must of necessity be; and the only question remaining is, whether you choose to stay and take care of your family, a traitor, or a perjured man, or prefer to leave them to suffer inconvenience, privation, or—if you choose to take an improbable extreme—even want itself, with the name of the husband and father unstained by dishonor and guilt."

"You use strong language, sir," replied Mr. Smithson, turning restlessly in his chair, "and present a bitter alternative."

"Such it may be, Mr. Smithson, such, indeed, I admit that it is; but I only call things by their right names, and offer the alternative as it stands. I am not responsible for it; if I were, I would speedily alter it, for I assure you that, personally, the thought of banishment from home at my age is as unwelcome to me as to any other man in the world. I am old now, and the arm-chair, the corner of the fire-side, and all the little nameless comforts of home, that I could once have done without, have become necessities, and I would willingly pay any price for them, except the sacrifice of principle. Believe me, sir, nothing but stern, unalterable necessity would make me consent to go into exile now."

"But I am not yet convinced that there is a stern, unalterable necessity in the case. I do not agree with you that, in the decision of any matter, consequences may be thus entirely ignored, nor do I think it right to look only to myself and my own feelings, and leave out of view the claims of wife and children. Be-

sides," he added, with a slight degree of bitterness and sarcasm in his tone, "I have no desire to make myself a martyr. There is in my nature none of the stuff that martyrs are made of."

"Now, Smithson," said Uncle John, laughing pleasantly, "who is talking of martyrdom, or who would advocate it? Certainly not I, for my ambition never led me to aspire either to its honors or its sufferings; but by calling such banishment as ours will probably be, martyrdom, you call it by altogether too high-sounding a title. If it be martyrdom at all, it is of so low a type that it partakes only of its inconveniences and disagreeable accompaniments, without any of that fame and admiration which dignify the suffering and sweeten the pain."

Mr. Smithson was evidently ill at ease. Dissatisfied with his own position, he was yet unwilling to accept Uncle John's. His reason and judgment were almost convinced; but the thought of home, family, and interest proved powerful weights in the opposite scale.

"Mr. Smithson," said Mr. Cameron, "there is still another argument on our side of the question, which has not been urged. It does not occupy the high moral ground of the others, and yet it is one which must appeal to you as a man, and especially as a father with a son in the Confederate army. Your son and mine have not only left the comfort and ease of home, and gone into voluntary exile, which is the thing that now seems so intolerable to us, but, more than this, they are daily enduring privations which it is not probable that we will be called upon to bear, and they are hourly risking their lives,—and for what? For the maintenance of those very principles which we are willing to renounce and forswear, the very moment that a manly adherence to them threatens the loss of property or brings upon us personal inconvenience. We encourage our sons to go, nay, we push them out into the army; we bid them suffer, yes, and die, for a cause which we ourselves are not willing to uphold by the sacrifice of a little property or a little personal comfort. I do not ask, Mr. Smithson, where is the consistency; but I go further, I ask where is the manhood, the paternal feeling of such conduct as this? I tell you, sir, that were I a soldier in that army, sacrificing health, and perhaps even life itself, no defeat in battle, no privations in camp, no suffering that I might endure, would so effectually paralyze my arm, and weaken my energies, and discourage my heart, as to know that the men for whom I was fighting so little valued the precious boon which I was purchasing at so tremendous a price, that, like Esau, they were willing to barter the costly birthright for a mess of pottage. A nation of such men would not be worth fighting for, for there would not

be soul enough in them to make freemen of! They would not know how to value the liberty that others had purchased for them, nor could they keep the sacred treasure when it was intrusted to them."

Mr. Smithson's face wore a deeper shade than ever. Mr. Cameron's last argument had been a home-thrust to the father's heart; but even then he was not willing to yield. The sacrifice was too costly; his property, now large and valuable, had been the gradual accumulation of a lifetime. He had known what it was to be straitened; and now, when he was growing old, and needed the luxuries and comforts which his life of toil and self-denial had accumulated, it seemed hard indeed to turn his back upon them all and go out into the world a homeless exile.

Uncle John plainly saw the struggle that was going on in his mind, and while he could not help feeling contempt for the man who had not the moral courage and the manliness to do right, still there mingled with it a compassion for his evident discomfort and restlessness. When he was going away, Uncle John said, kindly:

"We differ, Smithson, in our views of this matter; but in cases like this no man can decide what another must do. Each one must do what his own conscience approves."

"That is just my opinion," he replied, his face brightening. "Only the individual himself can know all the little circumstances which combine to shape his conduct, and to make that right for him which would be extremely wrong for another."

With this convenient and soothing sophistry, Mr. Smithson took his departure. Uncle John watched him as he rode down the lawn, and said, in a tone half comic and half sad:

"Poor Smithson! he came to the wrong place for comfort. He is sorely tried. He dies hard, very hard, poor fellow!"

"I don't think that he is dying at all, Uncle John, or that he intends to do so. It is very evident that he proposes to live on, and to live here, too, and take care of his property."

"Yes, yes," answered Uncle John, musingly, "it is a hard thing to part with property. There is no grasp like that with which money seizes the soul; there is no struggle so hard as that with which its hold must be loosened! Poor Smithson! I pity him."

Punctually at the appointed hour on the morning of the third day, Mr. Cameron and Uncle John presented themselves at headquarters, where they met some six or eight other gentlemen, among them Mr. Derby and Mr. Smithson. To an accurate observer of human nature, the faces of the group there assembled would have formed an interesting study. The general, in the

plenitude of his power, looked with serene complacency upon those whose destiny was at the mercy of his arbitrary will; some of them, with troubled and anxious faces, glanced first at one and then at another of their companions, as if hoping to catch some expression which would encourage them to do what inclination and interest prompted, but which their sense of right condemned; and others were serious and thoughtful, but calm and quiet, in the possession of that inward peace which every one must have in obeying the voice of conscience, no matter how much sacrifice that obedience involves.

The general opened the conversation by saying:

"I suppose, gentlemen, that you have come prepared to take the oath."

He addressed himself by word to them all; but he looked specially at Mr. Derby, who replied:

"I can only answer for myself, sir, that my conscience will not permit me to do it."

"If you would allow me the privilege of advising you, sir," replied the general, "I would counsel you not to be too hasty in your decision. It seems to me that your profession renders this matter a graver question with you than with these other gentlemen. With them it may be simply a choice between loyalty and the penalty of disloyalty, but with you it assumes a more serious aspect, and becomes a choice between political opinions and the sacred duties which, as a Christian minister, you are bound to perform."

"That is a very unjust statement of the case, sir," replied Mr. Derby, with dignity. "The question is not at all between political opinion and official duty; it is simply whether I will allow myself to be forced by arbitrary power to do what I know to be a *wrong act*, in order that thereby I may be allowed to perform ministerial duty."

At this moment a note was placed in Mr. Derby's hand. He glanced at the contents, and his face wore an expression of pain as he read the hasty summons to attend the death-bed of a valued and beloved parishioner. He gave the note to the general, asking to be paroled and allowed to perform the sad duty.

"Here is a case in point," replied the general, returning the note. "This summons you to the fulfillment of a duty to which you are solemnly pledged by your ordination vows. Now choose between them; you are free to act. Take the oath, and go your way in obedience to the call of ministerial duty, or else refuse, and prefer to be a traitor to your God rather than one to your so-called Southern Confederacy!"

Mr. Derby looked pained and distressed, not at the decision

now offered him, whose specious phraseology could not for an instant obscure the true alternative, but he was grieved at the immediate consequences of that decision. He thought of that death-bed, which his presence as a friend, as well as a Christian minister, would soothe and comfort, and his face reflected the sadness of his heart. For an instant his thoughts were busy elsewhere, and he did not reply; and the general, construing his silence into a wavering purpose, said:

"You ought to think more upon this subject. A reconsideration of it in all its bearings might perhaps alter your decision. I am disposed to be lenient, and would be willing to give you a few days more to decide; and, if you consent to that, I will parole you now to obey this summons."

"I need no more time to reflect, sir," replied Mr. Derby. "I have thought long and deeply upon this subject, even before I had a personal interest in it. I have studied it by the light of reason, of conscience, and of God's own Word; and even this last painful circumstance, coming upon me so unexpectedly, does not in the least affect my decision. I am not responsible for this or any other attending circumstance. My business alone is to decide what is *right*, what is *duty*, and that I have done long ago, independent of circumstances and of consequences. I repeat to you what I said at first, that my conscience will not permit me to take that oath."

"Very well, sir. You have, then, made your selection between political opinion and ministerial duty?"

"I have made my selection, sir, between the commands of God and the dictates of man. He has said, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself;' and, as a Christian man, fearing His name and reverencing His authority, I dare not do it."

"Your decision, then, I presume, is final?"

"Yes, sir, it is irrevocable."

Turning to the others, the general now asked:

"And what have you decided to do, gentlemen?"

"I, for one," replied Mr. Cameron, "have decided not to take that oath."

"Such, also, is my decision," said Uncle John.

One or two more gave the same answer, but Mr. Smithson and the others asked for a few days longer to decide.

The faltering purpose betrayed in the beginning by the troubled face and anxious eye was now plainly avowed by the petition for a longer time to reflect; and the wily general, seizing his opportunity, brought up an array of specious arguments, and gave them double power by skillful and subtle appeals, to which he well knew that their interests and inclinations would promptly respond.

The interview was closed by paroling these for a week, and Mr. Derby, Mr. Cameron, and the others until further orders.

"Our doom is sealed!" said Mr. Derby to Mr. Cameron and Uncle John, as they walked together down the street. "In a few days, or, it may be, in a few hours, we will be officially notified of banishment, either North or South."

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Cameron; "and what is to become of your wife and children, Mr. Derby?"

"Alas! sir," replied the minister, sadly, "God only knows! That was my struggle, Mr. Cameron, and I assure you that it was a hard one. I did not hesitate or falter, for my duty was too plain for that; but it was the severest trial of Christian faith that I ever had in my life, to consent to leave them under these circumstances. I tell you, sir, that it takes all of Christian manhood to meet an emergency like this with an unfaltering purpose. For myself alone I do not care; I could bear anything, but wife and little children——"

His voice faltered and he said no more, and at the next corner he left them without a word, and hurried down the street.

"Poor Mr. Derby!" said Mr. Cameron, following him with his eyes. "Ah, sir! his is a trial to which ours is as nothing."

"That is true," replied Uncle John; "and yet, in the difference between him and Mr. Smithson, how clearly defined is the line which separates the man of principle from him who has none! Their circumstances are the same,—no, not the same, either; for although both would leave wives and children behind, yet Mr. Smithson could provide for his family, in his absence, by many means which are not accessible to Mr. Derby; and yet the latter stands up unflinchingly to what is right, while the other pleads wife and children as the reason why he must do wrong! Suppose, Mr. Cameron," he added, with a twinkle of his eye, "that we tell Mr. Derby not to be so anxious about his family. Neighbor Smithson will doubtless take care of them."

"That is not probable," answered Mr. Cameron, smiling. "A man who cannot take care of his own principles is not the one to offer to take care of another man's family. My observation is that liberality generally goes hand in hand with strength of principle and honesty of purpose."

Two days passed quietly away, and nothing more was heard from headquarters; but on the morning of the third an order was brought to the Hall, requiring Mr. Cameron and Uncle John to report the next day at ten o'clock, in readiness to be escorted to the Confederate lines.

"Thank God for that privilege!" exclaimed Uncle John, drawing a long breath. "The thoughts of a Northern prison have weighed

heavily upon me for these last two days. To-morrow at ten o'clock; that is indeed short notice to a man who has any preparations to make. Thanks to Yankee consideration and forethought, however, I have nothing of that sort to do. They have kindly relieved me of the trouble of making arrangements to leave home, and it will not require either much time or much reflection to put away in my valise all the worldly effects of the old rebel, Uncle John. But you, Mr. Cameron; you will have something to do before you go, and little enough time they have allowed you for it."

"No, Uncle John," he answered, sadly. "I have nothing to do; nothing but to turn my back upon my home and all my earthly possessions, and go out, in my old age, a homeless wanderer. And for what?" he added, bitterly. "Not for any overt act, not even for an outspoken word; but for feelings and principles that are in my heart, and that belong as naturally to my moral nature as the bones and muscles do to my body. It seems to me that it would be just as reasonable to punish me for loving my children as for loving my country."

In the afternoon Mr. Cameron took a solitary ride over his plantation. Many of his servants had already left him, and many others were living in that complete idleness which is with them synonymous with freedom. Only a few remained faithful to their master, and obedient to his commands; and already his well-ordered farm began to show signs of decay and neglect. Many of his fences had furnished fuel for camp fires, and the fields which they had once inclosed were now a public highway. The larger proportion of his valuable stock had been stolen, and signs of ruin and desolation were all around. He sighed deeply as he looked upon the wreck, and compared it with what it had been a few months before, with what it would be when he should see it again, if indeed that would ever be.

During the remainder of the day he was silent and thoughtful, and soon after tea went to his own room, on the pretext of making arrangements for his journey, but in reality to be alone. It was with Mr. Cameron a severer struggle to leave his home than he cared for even Uncle John to know. He loved the Hall not only as the home of his manhood and married life, but there were ties and associations connected with it which ran far back to his childhood and infancy, and made it doubly dear to him. There were memories in his heart of scenes and events there in which he had participated, and of all those who had mingled in them he alone now survived. The others had long slept in the grave, and those memories, now become sacred, were awakened nowhere else, and were completely identified with the old Hall. Like the

heart of the dying Patriarch, which clung to the resting-place of his Dead, and made such touching mention of the old cave: "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah;" so now the heart of the old man, as he stood upon the threshold of that exile which might be for years, or perhaps forever, turned fondly to the graves of his household, and he longed to close his eyes amid scenes so full of the memories of father, mother, wife, and Eva, and to find his last resting-place beside them.

The next morning the servants crowded round him to say farewell. He shook hands with all the rest in silence; but when he came to Mammy Nancy, his children's nurse, *Eva's* nurse, he could not go without a word to her. He wrung her hand, and said, in a choking voice:

"Don't leave the old Hall, Nancy; stay by it until you die! Would to God that I could too!"

He flung himself upon his horse, buried the spur in his side, and flew down the lawn, and along the road, leaving Uncle John far behind. When he overtook him, the broken-hearted exile was leaning against the old walnut-tree in the grove, crying like a child.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IF kindness and affection could have made Julia happy, she would have been entirely so in Charles Beaufort's home, where at first for his sake, and afterward for her own, she was beloved and treated as a daughter and sister. In Charles's mother she realized her ideal, and the knowledge was both pleasant and painful: pleasant, inasmuch as she had at last found that maternal love for which she had so often and so vainly longed; and painful, inasmuch as it enabled her more fully to appreciate her deprivation during all the period of childhood and youth. She heard regularly from Charles and Walter, and had received two or three letters from her father soon after she left home; but for a long time she had not received a line from him, and exaggerated rumors of cruelties and outrages perpetrated at Hopedale, and in its vicinity, kept her always anxious and distressed.

It was a beautiful afternoon in February, one of those soft, bright days, which in the sunny South often come at this season, as if the spring, impatient of delay, was constrained to give the

earth a glimpse and foretaste of its soft air and balmy breath. The gay crocus, wooed by the sunshine, had already burst its wintery fetters, and might be seen, here and there, leaning its bright cheek against the dull, dark earth; and the buds of the yellow daffodil and the hyacinth were drinking in the sunlight that was to paint their petals and perfume their blossoms.

Julia had wandered through the garden, looking at the opening flowers, and thinking of home. The sight of flowers always recalled Eva: once, with her bright, happy face, twining garlands by Willie's couch; and afterward, with her pale, wan cheek, decorating herself with his favorite roses, that they as well as herself might welcome him home. But there was something specially to remind Julia of her sister now. This was the month in which she had been married, and there was something in the brightness and softness of the day that recalled her wedding day, and her image rose before Julia with startling vividness, with that one bright ray of golden sunshine streaming full upon her brow, as she stood before the altar in her solemn happiness. Then Julia's thoughts naturally passed from Eva to her father, and she wondered if he had grown much older in heart and in appearance since she left him. She was thinking sadly of his loneliness and desolation, when all at once she found herself encircled in somebody's arms, and held in a tight embrace, and when she looked up and saw her father's face, unlike her quiet self, she screamed out in her glad surprise. Then another pair of arms caught her, and not less amazed was she to see Uncle John.

There was great joy that night in that family-circle; and Uncle John's almost boyish delight at finding himself where he had so often longed to be, in the family-circle of William Beaufort, the friend of his youth, made him forget for the time being the cause that had sent him there. Nor was he less glad to see Grace once more, for in this separation from her, not less than in that other one three years before, he had found how necessary she was to his happiness. Ever since the day that she had heard the avowal of his feelings with a horror which he could not then understand, but which after circumstances had explained, he had tried to content himself with her friendship, and during those three years he believed that he had succeeded in doing so. The last few months, however, had taught him his mistake, and the anticipated pleasure of being once more with her had gone very far toward counterbalancing the pain of banishment.

For awhile Mr. Cameron's face wore its old familiar smile, for he, too, in the comfort of being with his children once more, found a compensation for the pain of leaving home; but afterward, when he felt more like one of the home-circle, and began

to exercise the freedom and unrestraint which belonged to him as such, the change in her father became painfully evident to Julia. Often in the large assembled circle, when the conversation was general, and when he thought that his silence would pass unobserved, he would relapse into a sad, dreamy abstraction, which plainly revealed the furrows upon his brow, and the deep lines of care and trouble about his mouth. Julia's heart ached as she looked at her father so sadly altered. Sometimes she wondered if he could indeed be the same person, whose bright, cheerful spirit used to lighten her home, but over which the war had first cast a shadow, afterward so deepened by a son's disgrace, and then by a daughter's death. Mr. Cameron was truly but the wreck of his former self.

Woman, born to endure, can long drag the weary burden of a wounded heart; but when once the strong, self-reliant man is broken in spirit, he sinks at once beneath the load.

As time passed on, Julia watched and hoped in vain to see her father regain his cheerfulness. She devoted herself to him, and used every artifice to divert his thoughts from home, and in this she was warmly seconded by the kind friends whose guest he was. He saw and appreciated their constant effort to promote his comfort. He knew that his pleasure was always considered, and that they studied to make him feel at home. He was very grateful; but the old man could not forget the Hall, could not forget that he was an exile. He tried hard to keep it all to himself. He would not cloud the happiness of others, nor would he be so ungrateful as to show that all the efforts of his warm-hearted friends to make him comfortable and happy were in vain. He tried to be cheerful and even gay, and strangers thought that his was a wonderfully buoyant heart; but Uncle John and Julia, who knew him better, saw with a pang the effort that he made, for they knew well the home-sick longing that was hidden beneath that cheerful exterior. The exile was weary of his banishment; the wanderer longed to go home. Day by day he grew perceptibly older, and weeks seemed to do for him the work of years. His hair rapidly silvered, his strength was soon all gone, his eye lost its brightness, and Mr. Cameron had become an infirm old man.

Uncle John and Julia watched him anxiously, but in silence. Neither spoke the fears which tortured both; but they often thought, with sad foreboding, of those words of his own, which now seemed about to become prophetic: "the old heart will not bear transplanting."

It was a sweet day in May, and Mr. Cameron was lying upon the sofa beside an open window. He was looking out upon a beautiful Southern landscape, but it was not a home-picture, and

he sighed deeply as he remembered the mountains that encircled Hopedale, the bright-green fields around the Hall, the grove, and the little brook, whose glad, cheerful voice had seemed to him alike in childhood, manhood, and old age, the very sweetest and most musical ripple that waters ever had.

Julia sat by her father in silence. She was never away from him now; but she did not talk much to him. She generally watched his pale and wasted and care-worn features, and a heavy weight seemed crushing the very life out of her heart.

Presently he turned his eyes languidly away from the landscape, and fixed them upon Julia.

"Come here, my daughter," he said. "Come close to me."

He took her hand and held it fast, and looking at her with a moistened eye, said, in a tone of plaintive sorrow that smote her to her very heart:

"I cannot bear it, my child, and I knew in the beginning that I could not. Friends are kind and I am grateful, but I want to go home, daughter,—I want to go home!"

The last thought, the last word of the broken-hearted exile was "home." He was right: he could not bear transplanting!

His heart had yearned for home, but he found his last home among strangers. Stranger-hands laid him away to rest, and stranger-hearts mourned for him, and strangers laid the flowers that he loved upon his grave.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ABOUT three weeks after her father's death, Julia read in the newspapers the announcement of the evacuation of Hopedale by the Federal troops, who were all being concentrated in the Army of the Potomac, for General Grant's campaign against Richmond.

She laid the paper down with a sigh, and murmured:

"Too late—too late for him! but I must go home!"

She pointed out the paragraph to Uncle John, and said:

"When may I go, Uncle John?"

"My child," he answered, "I would not advise you to go at all. The evacuation may only be temporary, for Hopedale is

still within Federal lines, and may at any moment be occupied again."

He paused a moment, thought of the probable ruin and desolation of the Hall, and taking her hand, his voice trembled, as he added :

"Daughter, the old Hall is changed now. It will not look like home. I would not go."

She shook her head sadly, as she replied :

"I must go, Uncle John. I want to go home."

He looked at the quivering lip, the sunken eye, the pale cheek; he thought of the burden of sorrow that had been laid upon that young heart, which three years before had known grief and trouble only by name; he thought, too, of the exile on whose now sealed lips he had so often heard the same words: "I want to go home;" and it was not in Uncle John's heart to refuse her. So he answered :

"You shall go, my daughter."

It was a bright May morning, when, after a weary journey over the well-remembered road, the party came in sight of Cameron Hall. The country through which they had passed on the preceding day had somewhat prepared Grace and Julia for the scene of desolation which awaited them at home. Ruined homesteads, ravaged plantations, fenceless fields, and blackened walls bore mournful witness to the desolating march of a relentless and merciless foe; and when a turn in the road revealed the Hall, still standing, with a sigh of relief Uncle John exclaimed :

"Thank God ! the old house is still left !"

The sun was shining as brightly and the birds were singing as merrily as they used to do, in the days of happiness and prosperity at the Hall; but all else was changed, sadly changed. Not a word was spoken as they drove through the grove; and as soon as they had crossed the brook, Julia got out of the carriage and walked alone along the familiar path. She was too much oppressed for tears, and her heart ached with a new pang at almost every step, for every feature of the scene was painfully identified with her father, and Walter, and Eva, and with memories of her childhood's happiness. When she reached the walnut-tree, she turned aside from the path, and a few steps brought her to the little family burying-ground, in a quiet spot, under the shade of a group of oaks. The iron railing that had once surrounded it was lying in fragments upon the ground, the monuments were broken and defaced, and the soft, green sward, that had once covered the graves, had only invited the desecrating tread of cattle. She turned away heart-sick, but as she was

about to leave the spot her eye was attracted by a mound that she knew was not there when she left home. It was just at the foot of Agnes's grave, was covered with nettles and brambles, and a rough head-board, with the simple word "Joe" rudely carved upon it, was the only memorial of that aimless, hopeless, joyless existence, which had always seemed much more like death than life. One single flower smiled upon its dreary desolation, and that had wandered from a running vine that grew upon Agnes's grave, a frail memorial of the tie that, in life, had bound together those two quiet sleepers.

When she reached the lawn, Julia found the fence gone, the splendid old trees felled, and the smooth velvet turf plowed by deep unsightly ruts. The graveled carriage-way was overgrown with grass, and the flower-borders on each side were a tangled mass of wild luxuriant weeds. No careful hand had pruned Eva's rose-bushes, and their long ungraceful branches extended far over the walk. Julia paused at the now empty pit. The sash, shattered and broken, was hanging upon one hinge, fragments of jars and boxes were scattered about, and dead stalks of heliotropes, azaleas, and camellias were lying around. One jar alone remained, and the wreck of a magnificent geranium, which had once been Eva's pride, as it now stood there, with its crisp, dead leaves, the solitary remnant of the luxuriant vegetation by which it had once been surrounded, seemed a fitting emblem of the daughter and sister returning alone to the wreck of her once happy home. Whichever way she turned, all was silent and mournful desolation. Not even the familiar faces and voices of the servants had come to welcome her; and oppressed as with a mighty weight, she felt as she might have done if, after a long absence, she had rushed to clasp to her heart her living father, and had suddenly found herself instead clinging to his cold and lifeless corpse. Yes, it was indeed but the corpse of her old home!

But if the scene without was sad, it was even more distressing when she went into the house. Carpetless floors stained and marred; broken furniture; walls covered with obscene and blasphemous language; shattered windows, from which the once handsome curtains hung in shreds,—all combined to form a chaos of hopeless ruin. Julia wandered about like one in a dream. Even while she looked upon the same scene repeated in every room, she could not realize it. Her wildest imaginings had never pictured anything like this; and, stupefied with amazement and sorrow, she passed from room to room with no settled purpose except to avoid the library. All the other rooms in the house had separate and distinct associations. In one, her father's image came up clear and distinct before her; in another, she saw Eva; and in

another, Willie: but the library was, as it were, *the home* of her home, the spot where all her pleasantest and most sacred memories were concentrated. There, father and children had been most together; there, she specially remembered Eva and Willie. It was the family shrine. No, she could not yet go into the library, she could not yet bear to see upon that sacred spot the traces of the spoiler's hand. Two or three times she had gone to the door, but had as often turned away with a sickening dread, and murmuring "not yet," had passed to other parts of the house as if trying to accustom herself elsewhere, to the sight that she knew awaited her there. At last, without giving herself time to shrink back, she rushed across the threshold and stood in the room.

A uniformed soldier was there alone, with his back to the door, his folded arms, his bowed head, his whole attitude expressive of the deepest sorrow. Julia stopped in surprise, looked at him doubtfully, and then advancing a few steps, was in an instant locked in Walter's arms. And there they stood, the brother and sister, the last of the family, looking in heart-broken silence upon the desolation of their home, fit emblem of the desolation of their hearts. Here indeed, as Julia had feared, ruin reigned supreme. Willie's sofa was broken and defaced, and Eva's little chair, that used always to sit beside it, was gone. Books were scattered everywhere: some upon tables and chairs, and some upon the floor; while stray leaves were lying about, and some with half-burned edges were upon the hearth. Mr. Cameron's writing-desk was a total wreck, and fragments of it were in different parts of the room. Julia reverently gathered them up, and felt, while she was doing so, that same crushing, leaden weight which was upon her heart when she stood beside her dead father. There was nothing in all the house so peculiarly his own and so identified with him. Julia knew that he regarded it with an affection which partook of veneration. It had been his father's, and after having been, as it were, the depository of his inmost feelings and most sacred treasures, it had descended to himself, to be, through his life, the same trusted friend. Upon that old desk his father had poured out to the woman of his choice those vows of love and protection which had won her young heart; and afterward their son had, upon the same old desk, recorded his devotion to the woman who had promised to be his wife. To its keeping, Julia knew that her father had always intrusted her mother's letters, both before and after their marriage, and never, until his exile, had they been withdrawn from its care. While she was engaged in her sad work, all at once Mammy Nancy burst into the room, and folding the brother and sister in her

wide-spread arms, exclaimed, laughing and crying at the same time :

“God bless my children ! God bless my children !”

It was the first thing that Julia had seen that looked like home, the first sound she had heard to welcome her ; and the tears which before had seemed frozen upon her heart, now melted at once, and leaning her head upon the bosom of the faithful old nurse, she sobbed and cried as if her heart would break.

As soon as Grace entered the house she quietly escaped up stairs, and in a few minutes stood before Agnes’s organ. It was the only thing in the house upon which no irreverent touch seemed to have been laid, and the mother looked at it in silent gratitude that the blind child’s treasure had been respected where all else had been despoiled. The old feeling was still in her heart, and to her eye Agnes was now sitting there as of old, and she saw the little blind face, first so full of the earnest thoughts and feelings struggling to find expression, and then radiant with the pleasure of having found for them their sweet musical utterance.

Grace thought that she was alone ; and Uncle John stood behind her several minutes before he could consent to interrupt her pleasing reverie.

She was startled when he said :

“You have come here, Grace, to be with Agnes.”

“Yes, Uncle John,” she answered. “I am always with her while I am here.”

She was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not look at Uncle John, nor did she remark a strange agitation in his voice and manner.

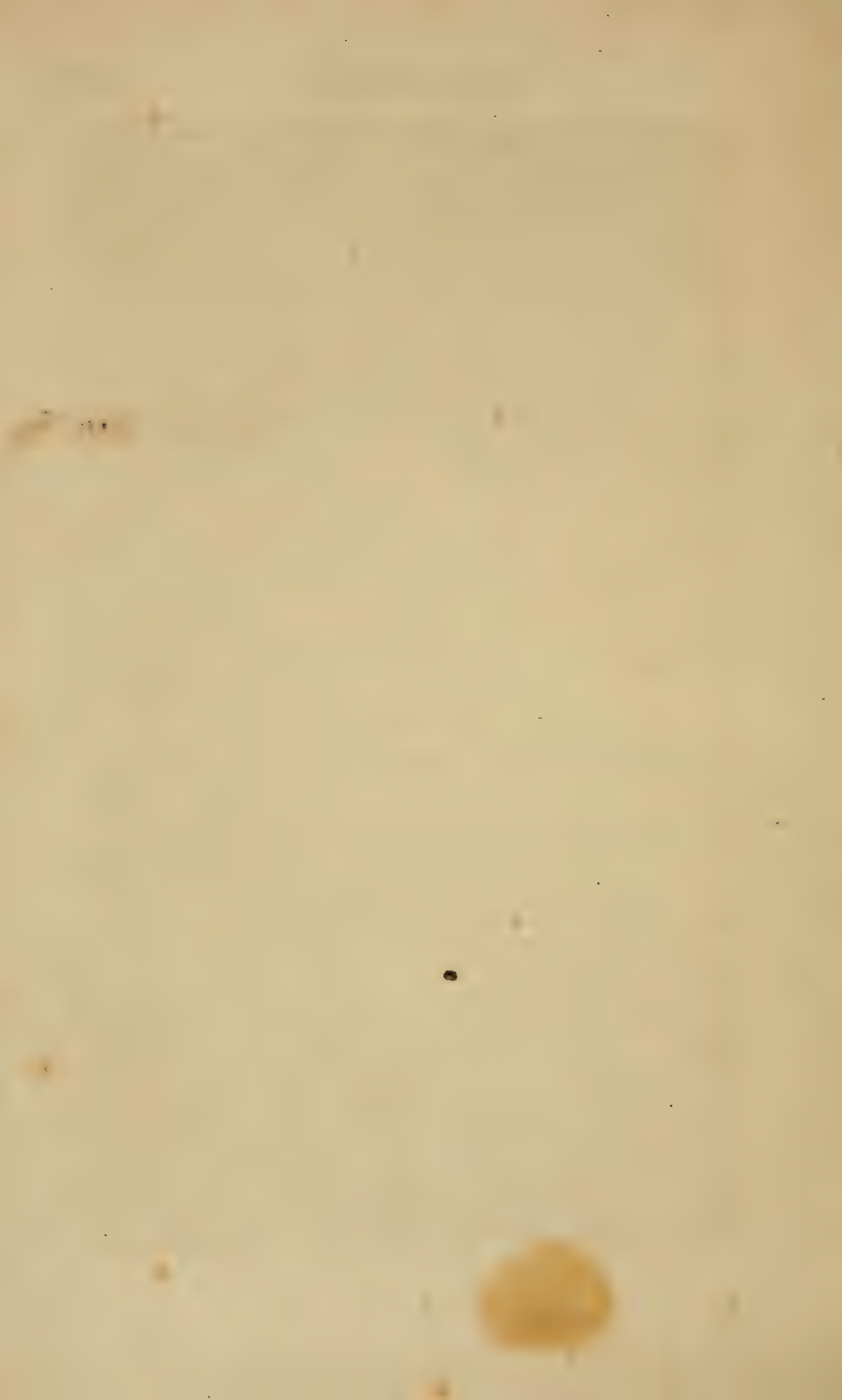
Presently he said, in a determined, resolute tone :

“I cannot live longer without you, Grace. To the child-angel of my youth I owe all that is worth having in my character ; to the wife of my old age let me owe all the affection that makes that age tolerable. Oh, Grace !” he continued, in an excited and hurried tone, “by the love that Agnes had for me, listen to me now. Let me transfer to you the promise of love and protection that I made to her, long years ago, and upon which her childish heart rested with unwavering confidence until she died ; and if you cannot, with your so much younger heart, love the old one which is still young in its love for you, yet for Agnes’s sake let me love and take care of you. I will not ask you to love me now ; my devotion to you shall teach you to do it.”

“I need no teaching, Uncle John,” she faltered ; “I have already learned it.”

Uncle John was happy. He whose early life had been blighted, and the ruin of whose youthful hopes and affections had been as complete as the desolation now around him, stood in the midst of that chaos, serene and happy. The sunshine which generally comes to the young had been reserved for him until now, and it was all the brighter, and warmer, and more cheering, because it came not altogether from without, but was partly the emanation of his own kind, and affectionate, and unselfish heart. And Grace was happy too, quietly happy in the secure possession of a strong deep love, which her trusting dependent nature had always needed but never had; and not unfit was it that she, who in the unconsciousness of childhood had recalled him from the moodiness of a morbid despair, should find, long years afterward, in his love, a blessed rest for a worn and weary heart.

THE END.







**RARE BOOK
COLLECTION**



**THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL**

**Wilmer
306**

